Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust

MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI

Life And Experiences Of Devotees

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LIFE & EXPERIENCES OF DEVOTEES

Brahmachari
Amritatma Chaitanya

Published by
Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust
Vallickavu (Parayakadavu)
(Via) Athinad, Quilon Dt., Kerala
INDIA 690542

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First Edition April 1988, 3000 copies
Second Edition August 1989, 3000 copies

Also available from
Mata Amritanandamayi Center
P.O. Box 613
San Ramon, CA
U.S.A. 94583-0613
Tel: (415) 537-9417

Computer type set
Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust
Desktop Publishing Unit
Vallickavu, Quilon Dt., INDIA 690542

Printed by offset
Jeyakar Offset Printers, Sivakasi-626 123

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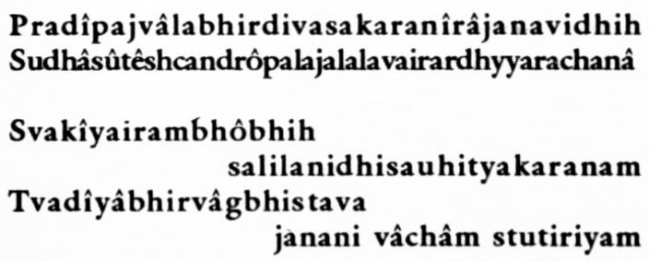
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many incidents which are narrated in this book were taken from the biography of the Holy Mother written in Malayalam by Prof. M.Ramakrishnan Nair to whom our heartfelt gratitude is due. Many thanks to Bri. Kusuma who was a great help in editing the book and to Br. Nealu and Bri. Gayatri who put a lot of effort into typing out the manuscript.

PREFACE



Oh, Mother! This praise of words in your honour composed with Your own words is like the worship of lights in honour of the sun done with its own rays, the oblation in honour of the moon with the water emanating from the moonstone, and the pleasing of the ocean with its own waters.

Saundaryalahari
Verse 100

Here is a mystic accessible to anyone and everyone, with whom you can converse and in whose presence you can feel God. She is humble but firm as the Earth. She is simple yet beautiful like the full moon. She is Love, she is Truth, she is the embodiment of Renunciation and self-sacrifice. She not only teaches but does. She is a giver of everything and a receiver of nothing. She is soft like a flower but hard like a diamond. She is a Great Master and a Great Mother. Such is Mata Amritanandamayi.

She was born in full Awareness. Having undergone or displayed (we know not which) rigorous sadhana (spiritual discipline), she then embraced the entire world with love and compassion of indescribable dimensions, the love and compassion that is her very fibre and being.

From her tender childhood she sought out the Divine Mother and Father even without the guidance of a Guru. She withstood the attacks of her kith and kin, of rationalists and miscreants all of whom tried to destroy her. All alone in the midst of this battlefield, she confronted everything unperturbed and with steadfast courage. At the age of 21 she outwardly manifested her state of God-Realisation and at 22 began to initiate seekers of Truth into spiritual life. By the age of 27, the Holy Mother had established the spiritual headquarters of her international Mission in the house of her birth. Five years later there were nearly 20 branch Ashrams throughout India and abroad. At the age of 33, in response to the invitation of her devotees in America and Europe, the Holy Mother made her first world tour inspiring and uplifting many people around the world.

Above all she has counselled, wiped the tears and removed the burdens of thousands and thousands of people from all walks of life and from every corner of the Earth. It is left to you, dear reader, to decide who and what she is through the intuition of your heart....

Amritatma Chaitanya

THE LEGEND

In the Alappad Panchayat,[1] district of Quilon, Kerala state, south India, there is situated a small village named Parayakadavu. This village lies amidst an endless expanse of coconut palms stretching along a narrow peninsula separated from the mainland to the east by an intercoastal waterway while the western shore of the village is buffeted by the sparkling blue-green Arabian Sea.

The people of this village belong to the humble clan of fisherfolk who proudly trace their ancestry as far back as the sage Parasara. It is sage Parasara who married the fishermaid Satyavati, the mother of Sri Veda Vyasa, the renowned codi- fier of the Vedas. There are many legends told about the sanc- tity and greatness of this village where daily life and social custom are still closely associated with such divine mythologies which the fisherfolk strongly believe happened thou- sands of years ago. One such legend is as follows:

Once Lord Subramanya,[2] son of Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati, committed a serious error. Infuriated by the transgression of His son. Lord Siva cursed Subramanya to take the birth of a fish. Dejected by the ill-fate of Her son, Parvati requested the Lord to forgive Subramanya's fault. Instead of consoling Her, Siva became more angry and cursed Parvati as well to take birth as a fisherwoman.Later when Lord Siva's anger had subsided He told Subramanya that He Himself would come and liberate both of them at the correct time and thus blessed them.

1 An alliance of five villages, the governing body overseeing local affairs.

[2] Another name for Sri Muruga, the brother of Sri Ganesh

In accordance with Lord Siva's curse. Lord Subramanya assumed the form of a fish, rather, a huge whale. Appearing in the sea of Alappad this huge whale caused the fishermen terrible harm. Accustomed to fishing both during the day and night time, the fishermen could now no longer venture into the seas. Sometimes the whale would tear the cast nets of the fishermen to shreds and at other times it would overturn their boats, endangering their very lives.In due course, the villagers were thrown in the midst of poverty and starvation.

The king of the fisherfolk also failed to find a solution. His treasury was becoming nearly bankrupt as he was feeding the starving people. Finally, in an attempt to solve the problem, he made a proclamation. The person who could catch the huge troublesome whale would be richly rewarded and would also be given the fair hand of the king's only daughter in royal marriage. Yet the huge whale was so dreadful that nobody came forth to accept this challenge and to test their fortune. Both the king and the subjects were completely dejected.

At this juncture, an old man mysteriously appeared from the north. Nobody knew who he was or from where he came. He approached the king, his back bowed with age, and declared that he could catch the huge whale and save the fisherfolk from complete devastation. Accompanied by the astonished king and his subjects, the old man walked towards the sea.

Making a long rope by using a certain type of creeper, the old man threw one end of it into the sea while holding the other end tightly in his hand. The rope made of creepers encircled the place where the huge whale was submerged. Next the old man gave the rope to the fishermen and instructed them to pull with all their might. While pulling, the old man told the fishermen to chant a particular mantra in order to trap the whale in the rope made of creepers.

Thus instructed by the old man, the native fishermen started pulling the rope while chanting the mantra taught by him. After a few hours of tremendous effort the giant fish, en-

trapped in the string made of creepers, was dragged to the shore. But to everyone's wonderment, the whale vanished into thin air as soon as it reached the shore.

The old man who had caught the whale was none other than Lord Siva. Thus Lord Subramanya had been released from the curse. A temple for Lord Subramanya was built where the giant fish had been shored. That temple stands as a living monument to remind us of the old story'.

But the legend does not end there. Now Lord Siva in the guise of the old man stepped forward and stood before the king. The king and his subjects understood the meaning of his action. The king, who had promised his only daughter in marriage to the one who caught the fish, was now in a dilemma. Both the king and his subjects were again completely distraught. How could a father, especially the king, give his young and unsurpassingly beautiful daughter, the princess, in marriage to an old man? The king requested the old man to ask for anything else in the entire kingdom except for his daughter. The old man calmly replied that the king should keep his promise and be truthful to his word.

Now the king was in a real quandry. Truth is the strength of the fisherfolk. They so firmly believe in Truth as their protector that it is said that without being truthful, if one goes fishing, it is like jumping into the wide open, fierce mouth of death. The king was unable to make any decision. He could neither break his vow nor give his beloved princess in marriage to the old man.

At this juncture, the princess, who was in fact Goddess Parvati Herself, stepped forward and without hesitation spoke. "Father and most noble king, it is everyone's duty to protect and preserve righteousness (dharma). Nothing should stand against it." Both the king and the subjects were despondent to see the princess depart with the old man but no other choice remained to be seen. Little did the fisherfolk suspect that their humble fishing kingdom had become the stage for a divine drama where Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati would be reunited. The natives, with heavy hearts, followed

the divine couple as they departed from the kingdom. After going a long distance the people asked, " Where are you going? We would also like to come with you." They replied, uWe don't have any particular dwelling place (uru); where we reach will be our dwelling place (chellunna uru)."

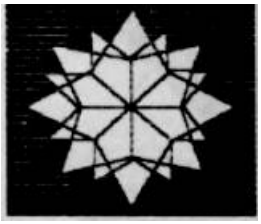
Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati continued on their way followed by the fisherfolk and after a long time they at last reached a particular spot where they stopped. Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati stood facing cast and west respectively and became stone images. Chclluruna uru (the place reached) later became Chenganoor of the present day.

In due course of time a temple was constructed and daily worship was commenced, but something very strange occurred at this time. Whenever water was brought to the Sanctum Sanctorum[3] to perform the worship, the priests would find a fish in it. Due to this occurence it became impossible to perform the daily worship. In order to find a solution, the temple authorities made an astrological calculation and discovered the whole story of Lord Siva, Goddess Parvati and the curse of Lord Subramanya. The astrological forecast further revealed that the marriage ceremonies of the old man and the princess had never been conducted. According to the sociial custom, the people of Alappad coastal area where Goddess Parvati was bom as a fish- ermaid should come with down' and such other marriage pres- entations to Chengannoor so as to conduct the marriage. Sub- sequently the necessary preparations were arranged in Chen- gannoor and Alappad. The fisherfolk of Alappad duly as- sembled all the paraphenalia and went to Chengannoor to con- duct the divine marriage ceremony,To this day, every year dur- ing the festival season this custom is followed in memory of this ancient legend. This temple still remains a centre of attraction to thousands of devotees.

A few decades ago an interesting incident took place in connection with the aforesaid story. One year the people from the Alappad coastal area did not participate in the festival by observing the customary rules and preparation thinking that it was

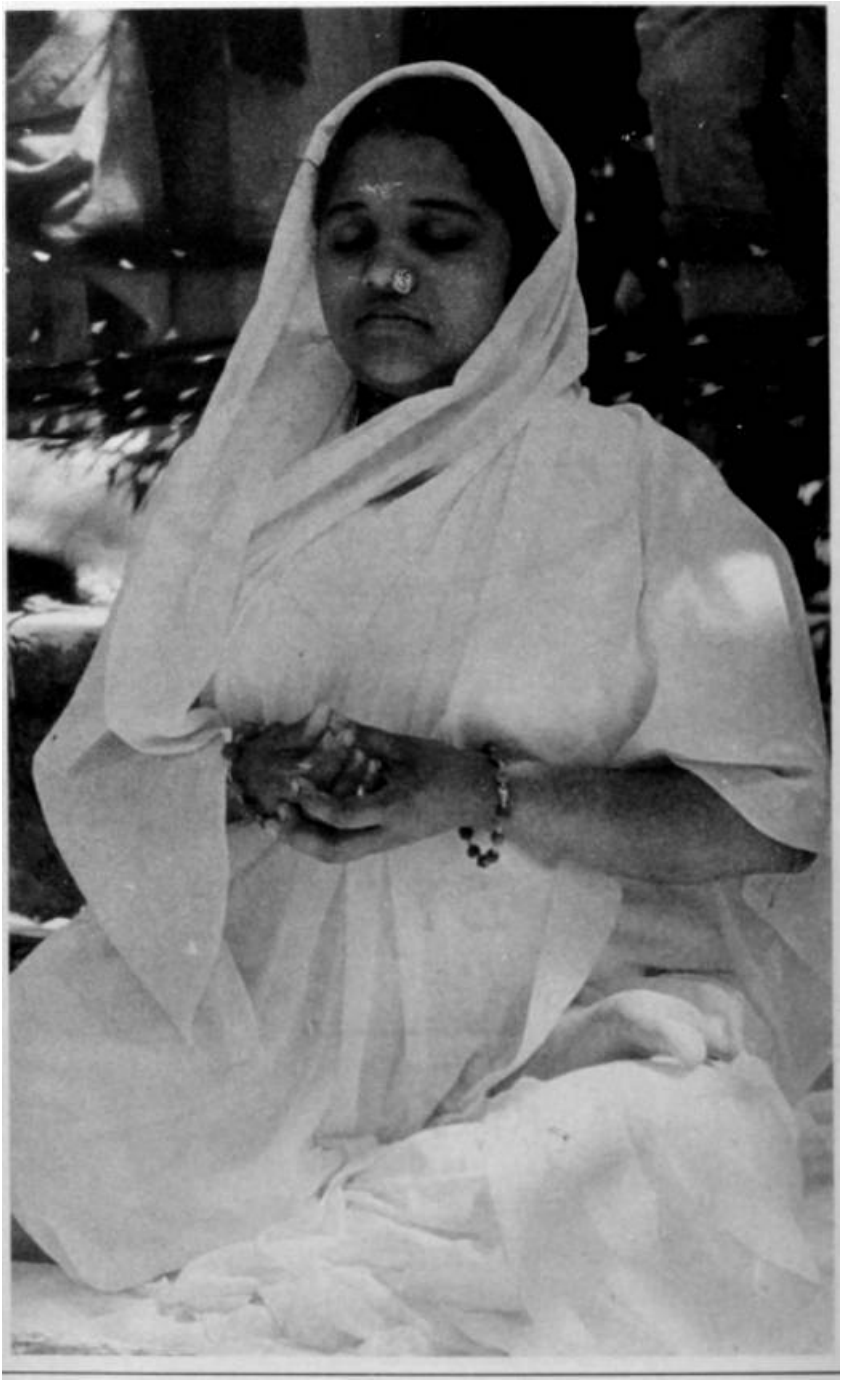
meaningless and wasteful to travel all the way to Chengannoor spending a lot of money. They thought, “Why should we co-opcrate in a festival which is conducted in a distant place?” But mysterious were the happenings which immediately resulted in the Chengannoor temple. The decorated elephant which was supposed to earn" the Lord’s idol in the procession stood still and refused to take even a step. All efforts to make it move failed. Word was immediately sent to Alappad of this inauspicious occurence but it was too late. The symptoms of small pox had already appeared in Alappad. Realizing their foolish mistake and with deep remorse, they made their way to Chengannoor without delay bringing all preparations for participating in the festival as was customary.

Such is the ancient lore which is intimately and unmistakeably intenvoven with this coastal landscape and its people. Is it a wonder then that these hallowed surroundings have again become the centre stage for a divine drama?



PART 1

Life

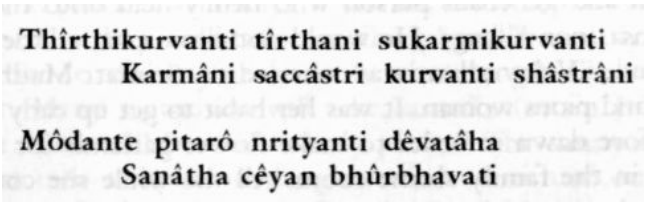


CHAPTER ONE

FROM BIRTH ITSELF

From birth itself I had an intense liking for the Divine Name. So much so, I would repeat the Lord's Name incessantly with every breath and a constant flow of divine thoughts was kept up in my mind irrespective of the place where I was or the work I was attending to. This unbroken recollection of God with love and devotion would be of immense help to any aspirant in attaining Divine Realization.

-Mata Amritanandamayi-



The Great Saints impart sanctity to places of pilgrimage, render actions righteous and good, and give spiritual authority to the scriptures.

When such a Saint is bom, the fathers rejoice, the Gods dance in joy and this Earth gets a saviour.

NARADA BHAKTI SUTRAS
VERSES 69-71

Ancestry

Idamannel was an ancient family of Parayakadavu village which comprised a small part of Alappad Panchayath. Though their hereditary work was fishing, they also did other work. Part and pael of their daily life was to perform religious practices and to observe various vows. The fisherfolk were also known for their munificent nature. When they returned from the sea with their day's catch,the first thing they would do is give some fish to all the villagers who had gathered without accepting any money. After selling their day's catch they would take a handful of coins and distribute it among all the children.

Many pious souls had been born in the Idamannel family. Sri Velayudhan was such a man. He was a very compassionate.

truthful and generous person who firmly held onto the ideal of ahimsa (non-killing). He would not allow even a little rat to be killed. Velayudhan was married to Srimati Madhavi, a chaste and pious woman. It was her habit to get up early morning before dawn in order to make flower garlands for all the deities in the family shrine room. All the while she could be heard chanting the Divine Names of God. Even today, though she is in her eighties, one can still find her seated before the temple stringing garlands with the same devoted spirit

Sugunanandan was their eldest son of five children. Inspired by the devotional atmosphere of his family, he became an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna. When he was nine or ten years old he began studying Kathakali, a classical dance drama of Kerala which depicts the spottings of the Gods and Goddesses. While the actors present the story through dance and mudras (divine gestures), the singers will narrate the story through songs. Sugunanandan's favourite character to enact was Sri Krishna. Once during a Kathakali performance he became so identified with his role of Krishna that he fell unconscious on the stage.

The atmosphere around Idamannel was very peaceful and calm. On three sides it was skirted by the backwaters which were alive with wildlife and surrounded by lush vegetation consisting of coconut, fruit and cashew trees. There were very few houses nearby in those days. Coming home from school when he was a young boy of 13 or 14, Sugunanandan and his cousin would partake in their favourite pastime of climbing the cashew trees and eating the delicious cashew fruits. One fine day found the two boys amidst the trees busily plucking cashews when they noticed a sannyasin[1] with long hair and beard approaching Idamannel. He had never before been seen in that area and the boys were intrigued by his radiant appearance. The sannyasin roamed about the property for a few minutes. All of a sudden he burst into blissful laugh-

1 A renunciate or monk.

ter and proclaimed loudly, “I can see many ascetics sitting immersed in deep meditation in this place. Previously this was the abode of many great souls whose tombs lie under this spot. Many sannyasins will take samadhi (attain Liberation) here. This will become a holy place.” The sannyasin again burst into a rapturous laughter and continued on his way never to be seen or heard of again. Puzzled by the mendicant’s statement, the boys resumed their play. Many years would pass before Sugunanandan and his cousin would shake their heads in wonder recalling the prophetic words of the wandering monk.

Before long, Sugunanandan became busy in his hereditary’ work of marketing fish and when he was twenty-one he married Damayanthi, a twenty year old girl from the neighbouring village. Bhandaraturuttu. Damayanthi was born into a devout family where religious practices were performed daily without fail. Her family even had its own family temple. From childhood onwards, Damayanti led a virtuous life. Her father Punyan and mother Karutta Kunya were also exemplary devotees of God. In short, the whole family atmosphere was conducive for her to lead a pure, religious life.

Damayanti was so pious that she was reverently called by the villagers, ‘Pattathi Amma' or the ‘brahmana lady’. Devotion to God being her mainstay in life, she would observe various religious vows almost everyday of the week. She frequently undertook fasting and on such occasions she would break her fast by drinking the water of tender coconuts which would mysteriously fall from the trees.

All told, thirteen children were born to Damayanti and Sugunanandan, though four died at birth and another after 53 days. The remaining children, four daughters and four sons, are named as follows: (in chronological order from eldest to youngest) Kasturbai, [2] Sunil Kumar[3] , Sudhamani,

2 Henceforth referred to as Kasturi, the colloquial form of her given name.

3. Henceforth referred to as Subhagan.

Sugunamma, Sajani, Suresh Kumar, Satheesh Kumar, and Sudhir Kumar. Of these children, it was Sudhamani who was destined to become known throughout the world as Mata Amritanandamayi, the Mother of Immortal Bliss.

It was during her fourth pregnancy that Damayanthi began having strange visions. Sometimes she would have wonderful dreams about Lord Krishna; at other times she beheld the divine sportings of Lord Siva and Devi, the Divine Mother. One such night Damayanti dreamt that a mysterious figure came and entrusted her with an idol of Sri Krishna which was cast in pure gold. Around the same time, Sugunanandan had a dream of the Divine Mother. As he was a devotee of Lord Krishna he was unable to understand why Devi should suddenly appear to him. Upon relating this story to Damayanti, he found that she had recently many strange visions also. They were both wondering what the significance was and whether some great good fortune would soon befall them.

At this time, Sugunanandan and Damayanthi were living in a small hut right on the seaside as this was more convenient for their fishing business than staying at their other hut on the Idamannel family property some five minutes walk inland. During her three previous pregnancies, Damayanthi had always experienced a swelling of her whole body a few weeks before her delivery date. This was a signal for her to relax her daily routine and return to her own family house in Bhandaraturutthu where she would be cared for during the delivery. Damayanthi was still waiting for the swelling to occur before making ready for the birth of her fourth child.

One night, Damayanthi had a wonderful dream that she gave birth to Krishna and He was lying on her lap drinking her breast milk. The next morning she was at the seaside engaged in some work when suddenly she had a feeling that she was going to deliver. However, Damayanthi discounted this sensation as the tell-tale swelling had not yet appeared. This strange feeling persisted though and Damayanthi put her work aside. For some reason she felt an inexplicable urge to go

to Idamannel and, crossing the backwaters all alone, she headed inland. Reaching there, she entered the small hut and began collecting a few items. A moment later, she felt a familiar sensation and realised that she was about to deliver. By the time she had spread a mat and laid down, the child had been bom! Damayanthi was shocked. She noticed that the baby was a girl. The atmosphere that enveloped the child's birth was completely silent and peaceful. Apart from the initial sensation which had alerted her, Damayanthi had not felt a thing. In fact, now that she was coming to her senses, she was filled with concern. Was the child even alive? She heard no cries typical of a newborn. Anxiously, she examined the child. Now Damayanthi was even more shocked. The babe had a beaming smile on her tiny face! The gaze of the child penetrated Damayanthi's innermost heart and was never to be forgotten.

At this moment, a woman from a neighbouring house appeared in the doorway of the hut. Quickly realizing what Damayanthi's situation was, she scurried around making her and the baby comfortable. Thus it was that on the morning of the 27th of September 1953, a tiny girl child was born in a humble hut of woven palm leaves amidst the sound of the ocean waves ever echoing upon the nearby shoreline.

The parents were puzzled by the babe's dark blue complexion and the fact that the child lay in padmasana[4] * holding her fingers in chinmudra[5] with the tip of her thumb and forefinger touching to form a circle. They feared that this dark blue shade might be the symptom of some strange disease and that the peculiar posture might be due to abnormal bone structure or dislocation. Various doctors were consulted. The fear of bone abnormality was allayed after it was confirmed during the medical exam that there was no such handicap. As for the skin colour, it could not be attributed to heredity since both

[4] The lotus posture of hatha yoga.

5.This mudra symbolizes the oneness of the individual self with the Supreme Self.

Damayanthi and Sugunanandan were light tan in skin tone. Hence, the parents were advised not to bathe the child for six months in the hope that the mysterious ailment would be cured.

Yet six months passed and still the baby girl retained the dark blue hue reminiscent of Lord Krishna and Divine Mother Kali. Eventually, over the course of time, this dark-blue changed into black. Yet, when the little girl's desire to behold the vision of Lord Krishna intensified, her skin colour once again assumed its blue hue. Even today, especially during the Divine Moods of Krishna and Devi, one can observe this dark blue skin tone.

Ironically, it was due to this blue-black hue that in the future, Damayanthi and the other family members would look upon the child with great disdain. This aversion for the dark child would eventually become the cause of her becoming the downtrodden servant of the family and relatives. In fact, only a few close relatives were even informed of the birth as not much importance was given to this newborn child. It was a girl and Damayanthi had already given birth to three other children besides.

Who could imagine that this strangely blue-coloured child born smiling benignly in a small hut along the shores of the Arabian Sea was, in fact, a spiritual giant come to this world to shower peace and godly love upon ailing humanity? Who could foresee this little one's spiritual legacy of helping thousands upon thousands of seekers to cross the Ocean of Transmigration?[6]

From the moment of the tiny girl's birth, the family began noticing unusual signs which would only be understood years later. Typically, before walking, a child will progress through various stages of development. First it will lie on its back, then roll over, then lie on the belly and push itself up with the forearms and so on. Eventually, the child begins

[6] The metaphorical representation of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

crawling and after some months it will get up on its two legs by holding onto something. All this will culminate in the toddling stage around one year of age. This little girl's ease was entirely different as none of these stages occurred. One day, after turning six months old, the little girl suddenly stood up and straight-away walked across the verandah. Soon after this, she started running which filled everyone's heart with wonder and joy.

Ambrosial Jewel

The parents gave the name Sudhamani, which means 'Ambrosial Jewel', to their remarkable baby daughter. Unlike most other children her age, Sudhamani started speaking her mother tongue Malayalam when she was barely six months old. Her passion to sing the Divine Names manifested as soon as she began to speak fairly well. At the tender age of two, without instruction from anybody, she began saying prayers and singing short songs in praise of Sri Krishna. Needless to say, the family was quite taken aback on such occasions when they happened to overhear the little one. Over the course of the next year, Sudhamani established a daily habit of melodiously chanting the Divine Names aloud and to this day, this custom persists without interruption. Now aged four, she would sing with devotional fervour her one or two line compositions seated before her small pet portrait of the Lord.

From her infancy, Sudhamani was full of vigour and briskness. She grew up as an obedient child and was well loved by everyone. Even unacquainted people would feel an inexplicable attraction and affection for little Sudhamani. Love for God, concern for others and other such noble traits manifested themselves in her from early childhood. Due to these virtuous qualities, everyone in the village would call her by the pet name 'Kunju' which means 'the little one'. Strangely enough, it would be these same qualities that later became the focal point for severe abuse and maltreatment which would be meted out to her by her own family and relatives.

By the time Sudhamani turned five, a visible stream of inborn devotion to Lord Sri Krishna started flowing from her heart and before long, this love took the form of full-fledged devotional songs. The little one's songs were filled with poignant longing for her beloved Krishna and her enchanting, soulful singing of these simple, yet at the same time deeply mystical songs, became well-known throughout the village. While chanting or singing, she would focus her eyes on a picture of Krishna which she always kept tucked inside her shirt. Then she would sit unmoving for a long time. This extraordinary behaviour and intense devotion amazed everyone and attracted the attention of all the devout villagers. They would arise early morning just to hear the little one's angelic singing greeting the newborn day.

O Lord Who has protected Gokulam as the Dear Child of Ampati, O Lord of the Ocean of Milk, Who art the colour of clouds, O Thou with the lotus eyes, I adore Thee with joined palms...

Please give relief from sin to the sinners, O Thou Who art the colour of dark clouds. Please show compassion to the poor ones in this village...

O Lord of the flute Who wears yellow raiment, O Thou Who wears the garland of jasmine, please come playing the flute. O Destroyer of Putana, please protect me!

O the One Who reclines on a huge serpent, O Lord of Gokulam Who has prevented the torrential rain, please make me one with Thy Lotus Feet thereby ridding me of the pain in my soul...

Even at this age, certain visible traits of divinity were noticed in Sudhamani. While engaged in childhood spottings or other daily activities, she would suddenly become indrawn irrespective of time or place. On such occasions, the parents or

other family members would find her sitting motionless in some lonely, isolated place. At other times, she would be found sitting near the backwaters looking intently into the water or silently gazing at the blue sky as if transported to another world. It was not uncommon to find her sitting in solitude with closed eyes. When she was aroused, her mood would be abstracted.

Unable to understand the import of these unusual states of their daughter, the parents would scold Sudhamani for not being playful like the other children. This marked the beginning of a long period of malignment of their daughter and misinterpretation of her undaunted flight to the realm of the Divine For their part, the parents were worried that her peculiar way of acting may pave the way for a psychological disorder.

When Sudhamani turned five, she was enrolled as a student of the first grade at Srayicadu School in the nearby village. Even at this age, she exhibited brilliant intelligence and memory'. Having heard a lesson once, she would not forget even a portion of it. She could effortlessly recite any of the subjects which had been taught in the class or which she had read. When Sudhamani was studying in the second grade, she would easily recite the lessons of the advanced grades simply by overhearing the text when it had been read aloud. Her upper classmates, including her elder brother and sister, would sometimes receive harsh punishment from the teacher for being unable to learn verses of poetry by heart. Meanwhile, little Sudhamani, who was studying in the lower grade, would melodiously sing the poems and dance to the tune like a delicate butterfly. All the teachers liked her and were surprised by Kunju's memory the likes of which they had never seen. She scored full marks in all subjects and was ranked first in the class despite the fact that she was often absent due to household responsibilities.

Another incident which illustrates Sudhamani's remarkable memory is as follows. One day five months after Damayanthi had given birth, she went outside the house and left the

child under the care of Sugunanandan. For some unknown reason the babe became restless and began weeping. Unaccustomed to such behaviour, try as he might, Sugunanandan could not console the child. This went on for quite some time and eventually Sugunanandan became exasperated, lost his patience and flung her on the cot.

Many years later, Sudhamani remarked to her father, "Oh, the way you threw me away that day! You were about to kill me!" At first, Sugunanandan did not understand the import of Sudhamani's words. After a few moments, the old incident flashed through his mind and he was once again astounded by his daughter's memory'.

Whatever free time Sudhamani had in school would be spent in completing her homework with the thought that after reaching home, she could utilize that much time in the remembrance of God. Returning home, the little girl would first help her mother in the household chores. Otherwise, she would forget herself singing devotional songs.

Even from childhood, Sudhamani was very' careful about the proper application of time. Never would she waste even a moment sitting idle. While attending to her steadily mounting household duties, Sudhamani would always be heard chanting the Divine Name of Lord Krishna. Visualizing her beloved Krishna's beautiful form within her heart while repeating His Divine Name, Kunju spent her days and nights in her own world.

The house where Sudhamani spent her childhood days consisted in its entirety of two tiny rooms and a kitchen. Owing to the inconvenience caused by such tight living quarters, Sugunanandan built a small room alongside the cowshed. This was used as a study room for the children, but it was in the cowshed that little Sudhamani spent her childhood days meditating and singing devotional songs. There were two other refugees in the same cowshed. One orphan woman

7 **In The general proximity of where the old Bhava Darshan Temple now stands.**

named Potichi, who was a barber, and her child. Taking pity on their helpless condition, Sugunanandan had allowed them to stay there. Potichi, the barber woman, loved Sudhamani very much. She would always carry the little one on her hip and in those days it was Potichi who looked after Sudhamani much more than Damayanthi.

Thus we find gentle Sudhamani living in the cowshed all the while focusing her heart and soul upon the enchanting form of Lord Krishna. Just as cows were very dear to Sri Krishna, the little girl also adored them. Any spare time she got would be spent sitting there in solitude lost in a divine reverie. The little one remained free to revel in the bliss of longing to behold the resplendent Vision of Krishna.

On account of Sudhamani's loving nature, she was always surrounded by children. Whenever they got a chance they would come to Idamanncl to play with her. Together, they would go to gather grass for the cows. Though Sudhamani's little friends were not interested in doing such work, in order to enjoy her cheerful company they would happily join in. All of them had a mysterious attraction and strong bond of love for her. Having completed all the work, Sudhamani would involve the children in various games and attract other children by her enactment of Krishna Leela, the sportings of Sri Krishna as a child. Without much difficulty, she would encourage the whole group to sing in loud chorus the devotional songs which were ever flowing through her mind.

Nobody could understand Sudhamani's devotional moods which were intensifying day by day. As weeks and months passed she became increasingly absorbed in her devotional activities. Day in and day out the little one would be heard singing full of deep longing to see the divine beauty of her Lord. Her ecstatic moods became more and more frequent and were not always confined to the cowshed. Oblivious to the world around her, Sudhamani would sometimes dance in ecstacy while moving in a circle and singing devotional songs. The following is a song composed by Kunju at the age of seven:

Protect me, O Supreme Lord who resides
In the city of Guruvayoor...
O Child Krishna who acted as a cowherd boy,
O Lord of the Universe, Consort of Goddess Lakshmi,
Protect me, O Krishna, the Beloved of Radha,
O Krishna, the Beloved of the Gopis,
O Krishna, the son of Nanda,
O Krishna who is worshipped and adored by everyone...

The family and neighbours were totally ignorant about the exalted moods of little Sudhamani and took it to be her childhood sportings. Who could imagine that this seven year old girl, having received no spiritual instruction, was swimming in the Ocean of Pure Love and Bliss? Lost to this world, Kunju would sometimes lock herself in a room and sing and dance in ecstacy. During one such occasion Damayanthi peeped through the door and exclaimed, “Look and see how our daughter dances’ We should give her dancing lessons!" Poor parents! They were only acquainted with worldly dance. Never had they heard or read about someone dancing in God-intoxicated bliss.Had there been somebody present who had studied the lives of the Great Souls, then perhaps they would have recognized Sudhamani’s spiritual states. Even then, who would expect to find such a rapturous state in a child at this young age? As it was, the family thought it was merely the antics of their slightly eccentric and over imaginative daughter.

Sudhamani’s longing to behold and merge in her Supreme Lord continued unabated. Time and time again one would find her gazing at the small portrait of Krishna which she kept safely tucked in her shirt. Pouring out her heart to Him, either in song or prayer, the little girl would cry out, “O my darling Krishna, I am seeing troubles and suffering all around me! O Krishna! Please do not forget to look after this tiny child. I am always calling You, won't You come and sport with me?”

The following song was composed by Sudhamani at the age of eight and gives a glimpse of the depth and breadth of her spiritual intensity:

O Essence of Mercy, O Compassionate One,
O Krishna, give me refuge!

O Krishna, is the story of these burning
Tears that flow out unknown to Thee?

Offering flowers at Thy Feet that have
Crushed the serpent Kaliya I will worship
Thee, O Krishna...

Thou came as the charioteer of Arjuna
At Kurukshetra and protected
Truth and Righteousness...
O Lord Who preserves Dharma
Show a bit of compassion to us!

O Lord of the Gita, Lover of Divine Music,
Give the capacity to sing Thy song...
O Lover of devotional singing,
Do You not hear Thy sacred Names
Uttered from the innermost heart?

the little one's despondent-looking face and her sorrowful songs captured the sympathetic hear of the villagers. But the great mystery of Sudhamani's inner life still remained unknown to all. Who could imagine the ecstatic jubilation of her childhood devotion? Who could understand it except for the Wise?

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CHAPTER TWO

THE DIVINE SERVANT

Mother is the servant of servants. She has no special place to dwell. She dwells in your heart...

-Mata Amritananandamayi-

Kâminîriti hi yâminishu khalu kâmanîyaka
nidhê bhavân
Pûrnasammada rasârnavam
kamapi yôgigamya manubhâvayan
Brahmashankara mukhânapîha
pashupanganâsu bahumânayan
Bhaktalôka gamanîyarûpa
kamanîya drishna paripâhi mâm

O Treasure-house of Beauty! Thou who thus didst during nights confer on the love-lorn Gopikas that same immense and intense joy of the Spirit which only Yogis attain, and thereby didst make them respect-worthy even for Bralnna and Shiva. May Thou, O Krishna of lovely form, accessible only to men endowed with devotion, be pleased to protect me!

SRIMAD NARAYANEEYAM
CANTO 69, VERSE 11

At the age of nine, Sudhamani duly reached the fourth grade. By now she had been entrusted with many of the household duties by her chronically ailing mother. Getting up before dawn, she would attend to her duties and only after finishing the work would she hurry off to school. Returning home in the evening, whatever time was not spent in chores would be spent in prayer and meditation. Still carrying her pet portrait everywhere, she would shed tears embracing and kissing it. The picture would become drenched by her teardrops.

Sometimes Damayanthi would go to fetch water in a distant place leaving little Sudhamani behind. Unobserved, she would follow, thinking that she may be of assistance to her

mother. If Damayanthi ever tried to prevent her from coming, Sudhamani would loudly protest. Due to her stubborn nature in this matter sometimes Damayanti would even lock her up in a room. She would try to frighten the little girl saying, “Here comes a ghost! It is coming to get you!” But nobody could frighten Sudhamani. Though a small child, she was fearless and courageous from the youngest age. This fact also commanded the respect of the local villagers who already had affection for the virtuous little girl.

There was a woman in the village well known for frightening small children. If children became too mischievous, the parents would call her to frighten them into obedience. Her name was Appisil Amma and sometimes she was called to Idammanel to frighten little Sudhamani. This notorious woman would sneak up to the window where little Sudhamani was sitting. She would cover her head with a sack and jump and shriek while showing frightening gestures. Peering through the window the little one would boldly announce, “Go away, I know who you are. You are that Appisil Amma. Don't try to frighten me!"

Like a gnef stricken, forsaken child Sudhamani would call on her beloved Krishna. The villagers now considered her as one who dwelled in another world. Unable to understand the reason for the little one's agony they used to sympathize with her condition saying, “What a pity! Poor child. What happened to her? Teardrops are always streaming down her cheeks. What a deplorable condition. Was she bom only to shed tears? are the family members giving her a hard time? If so, what has she done to undergo all these hardships?” Everyone took pity on Sudhamani and some even tried to console her. But who else other than the Beloved of the Gopis could appease her unquenchable thirst for spiritual Unity?

As mentioned previously, the little one’s equal vision, noble character, compassion towards all living creatures and melodious singing had endeared her to all the villagers. All those whose good fortune it was to come in contact with her would soon find themselves opening their heart to her. However, fate was not so kind when it came to her own family

members. Sudhamani's mother and elder brother were particularly at odds with the little one because of her unusual behavior.

At this juncture, due to the birth of five more children Damayanthi's health completely deteriorated and she was rendered incapable of tending to any household chores. This task, already done in part by Sudhamani, now fell entirely on her shoulders. Kasturi, the eldest daughter, was studying in a local college and Subhagan, the eldest son, was also studying. Thus, it was that the whole responsibility became Sudhamani's. This was the beginning of a life of trials and tribulations for the little one.

Sudhamani toiled day in and day out. Getting up as early as 3 o'clock she would set to work cleaning the house, sweeping the compound, fetching water, cooking the food, tending and milking the cows and other sundry jobs like washing the family members clothes and scrubbing the cooking vessels.

Such a hard routine would have been backbreaking even for an adult not to mention poor little Sudhamani. Even to look after the family livestock and poultry was enough work for one person. Yet Sudhamani would patiently and ardently do all the work without a grumble.

Due to the heavy work load, Sudhamani's education nearly came to an end at this point. Overburdened with work the little one could not reach school in time most of the days. Somehow she would manage to discharge her duties and in a haste run to class. But the classes would have already begun and as a punishment for being tardy, the teachers would make the little one stand outside the classroom. Even though she was forced to stand outside, Sudhamani would keenly attend the classes. Somehow she managed to complete the fourth grade.

However, by the time she reached the fifth grade it became impossible for the little one to continue looking after the never ending stream of household chores as well as her studies. Thus at the age of ten, little Sudhamani was forced to abandon her schooling. Having done so, she became fully

involved in the domestic chores. From early morning before dawn until late in the night she would toil. Yet, even while engaged in this burdensome work, the little one was always heard singing or chanting the Divine Names of her beloved Krishna. Sometimes in the middle of a job she would become absorbed in her devotional mood and would forget the external circumstances.

As mentioned, the little one's day began well before dawn. If ever she happened to sleep a bit more due to exhaustion, Damayanthi would not hesitate to pour a pitcher of cold water on Sudhamani. Soon after waking up, the first thing to do was to beat the coconut husks with a pestle to turn it into a soft fibre. This would eventually be used to manufacture coir, a local product. After this the first round of work began with tidying the house and yard, fetching the water from the village water tap located some distance away, washing the utensils, cooking the meals and getting her younger brothers and sisters ready for school. The next set of work involved bathing the cows, feeding them fodder, again washing the cooking vessels after serving lunch, washing all the clothing of the family and going out to gather grass for the cows. By now it would lx* 4 o'clock in the afternoon and time for her brothers and sisters to return from school. The little one would prepare a light snack and tea for them. In the course of her duties she would somehow have to find time to visit the neighbouring houses to collect any vegetable scraps or rice gruel for feeding the cows. Besides this, Damayanthi instructed the little girl to discharge any of the household duties in the houses she visited if she noticed that they had not been properly attended to. Again the little one would prepare the evening meal for the family and wash the vessels.

No one would ever lend any assistance to the poor little girl; she was now considered to be the servant and these were her duties. Damayanthi's sharp eyes would scrutinize each and every action and work of the little one. If any error, however slight, was detected, there would come swift punish-

ment. Sudhamani's only friend was Krishna, the Name that she would never forget. Her sole inspiration was that Name. Even while engaged in the various tasks, the intense thought of her beloved Lord would bring tears to her eyes and she would cry and cry for hours together.

Finally Sudhamani's day would come to an end around eleven in the night. This was the only time that the innocent girl had for taking rest. But not to rest lying on the bed, rather to rest in herself...that is to call on her Lord. When everybody was fast asleep, the little one would sit in the small family shrine room pouring her heart out to Lord Krishna through devotional singing. In the darkness of the night, Sudhamani would cry, heartbroken and sing until she would finally fall asleep.

O Krishna, please show compassion to me!
O Lord Vishnu, I adore Thee with joined palms!
You please rid me of the burden of speech,
Mind and body!
You please protect me with affection!

O Krishna, do You, Who are the Friend of the Miserable,
not have even a bit of compassion?
Are You dwelling only in the golden temple?
Have Thy shining eyes become dim?

O Ocean of Compassion,
Thou art affectionate towards the devotees!
Thy Feet are the Eternal Support!

Even in those days, Sudhamani's mind was so high flying that it would soar to the heights of divinity at any moment inspired by any heart-capturing sight or song. One day, the little one went to the market to make some purchases. While returning home, she heard the strains of a devotional song coming from some distant place. Without a second thought, attracted by the song and in a semi-conscious mood, Sudha-

mani turned and walked in the direction of the singing. Reaching that place, it turned out that the source of the heart-capturing song was a Christian family where somebody had died that day. The relatives were sitting around the corpse singing hymns in a lone full of sorrow. The little one's heart was immediately stolen and she became lost to the world standing motionless in a God-intoxicated mood. Her eyes were closed and tears rolled down her cheeks. The purchased goods fell from her hands and the people gathered there knew not what to make of this unknown girl's sudden transformation mistakenly thinking that she was also moved by the death of their relative.

One half hour passed like this before Sudhamani partially regained her normal consciousness. Picking up the fallen purchases, she hurriedly continued on her way home. But it was too late. As expected, Damayanthi was standing there in a huff. In a fit of fury she chastised Sudhamani and severely beat her. The little one was still in an indrawn state and received Damayanthi's harsh treatment silently and unmoved. What external force can distract a mind which is absorbed in God?

Besides her exceptional brilliance, undaunted cheerfulness, exemplary devotion and soul-stirring singing, Sudhamani was known most of all for her uncompromising compassion for the poor and needy. Although Sudhamani did her best to assist her mother in the household chores, Damayanthi, who was hot-tempered by nature, would not hesitate to severely punish her for the slightest error. As previously mentioned, there was a particular reason for Damayanthi's aversion to little Sudhaman, i.e., her dark complexion. Besides that, sometimes Damayanthi would catch the little one sneaking off with butter, milk and curd just like the notorious butter thief Sri Krishna. What Damayanthi didn't discover for some time was that these edibles were being supplied to the starving families which Sudhamani would befriend.

Unnoticed by others, the little one would surrepticiously sneak off with milk and curds after replacing the pilfered quantity with water. If discovered, she would get a good beat-

ing. Oftentimes the little one's compassionate tendency was exploited by her brothers and sisters who would also steal edibles, but for themselves, and then accuse Sudhamani. Though she knew who the real thief was, she would not utter a word against them. Silently she would endure the harsh blows which were her lot.

If Sudhamani came to know of any family which was starving she would snitch money from her mother's little collection box so that the necessary purchases could be made. If this was not possible, then she would obstinately pester her father until he would give her a bit of money. If these two means failed to secure the needed amount then the little one would take raw foodstuffs from her own family's meagre storeroom and give it to the family in need.

Except for certain childhood pranks and lighter moods, all mischiefs of Sudhamani had a selfless intention as the basis. Such actions were the result of her inborn compassion for the suffering masses. However, such charitable service did not endear her to Damayanthi who was quick to inflict a harsh dose of corporeal punishment. Regardless of the sacrifice and suffering which she had to undergo, the little one found immense satisfaction and bliss in giving peace and extending help to others. She was not at all deterred from these benevolent practices despite the punishment. She would never let others know the renunciation which she had to endure in order to render her services to the poverty stricken villagers.

Most of the time Sugunanandan would be absent from Idamannel for days together in connection with his fishing business returning only late in the night when all the children were fast asleep. On such occasions the first thing that Damayanthi would do was enumerate the accusations against little Sudhamani. On one such occasion Sudhamani, who was pretending to be asleep suddenly shouted out, I am not your daughter, I must be your daughter-in-law! " Damayanthi was taken aback hearing Sudhamani's replay. The little one's implication was clear; she was reminding Damayanthi that a real mother would patiently forgive the faults of her

daughter whereas only a mother-in-law would so meticulously report the mistakes of a daughter-in-law exaggerated ten times over at that

Who could imagine that the virtuous little Sudhamani's insatiable appetite for relieving the sorrow and suffering of the people would soon bring the whole world flocking to the distant shores of the Arabian Sea just as one dying of thirst seeks out the oasis? How can one grasp, let alone fully appreciate, the fact that Sudhamani, not yet aged 10 years, was creating an impact in this remote fishing village which was destined to be felt the world over?

Though she discharged her duties with utmost sincerity, her mother would not spare the rod even for the slightest mistake. If Sudhamani showed any laxity in the work Damayanthi would warn her saying, "Hey girl, don't be lazy! If you sit idle God won't give you any work and at last you will die out of starvation. Always pray to God, 'O God, please give me work'. That is how everyone Pray's." Hearing these words, Sudhamani thenceforth would pray, "O Krishna, please do give me work, please give me Your work!"

The patience, forbearance and sacrifice which Sudhamani showed was incredible. Her capacity to take everything in stride while incessently' remembering her Beloved foreshadowed the arrival of one more Great Soul in India's unbroken legacy' of God-Realized Saviours. Although the little one had to undergo countless ordeals of life and was tortured pitilessly, she took everything as the benevolence of Divine Providence. All her sorrow was kept within and confided only in the Divine Flute Player, Lord Krishna.

In the dark of the night behind the dosed doors of the family shrine room, she would pray to Krishna with tear-filled eyes, "O my Beloved Krishna, nobody except You can understand my heart. This world is full of sorrow and suffering. Selfishness reigns supreme. People seek only the own happiness and pleasure. My darling Kanna,[1] I desire nothing else

1. **A name of Krishna.**

except complete oneness with You. O Lord, didn't You see my suffering today? O Lord, please come! Let me see Your Divine Form! These miseries are nothing for me, but the separation from You is heartbreaking."

The following is a song composed by Sudhamani during this period:

O Embodiment of Compassion Who art of black
Colour, deign to open Thy eyes.
Art Thou not the Destroyer of Sorrow?
This being so, do remove my sufferings!

In this world Thou art the shelter,
O bright-coloured One with eyes like the petals
Of a red lotus. I worship Thee forever
With the flowers of my tears, O Krishna...

O Gopala, Enchanter of the mind,
I am groping in the darkness.
O Thou Who fillest the 14 worlds, O Sridhara.
Open Thy eyes and rid me of sorrow...

Thus, three years of intense yearning and ordeals passed. Sudhamani, now aged thirteen, still worked hard. It seemed that as she grew older, her responsibilities also grew. Without uttering a complaint, she continued her struggle as before. At the same time, her spiritual practices also became more and more intense. One could see the little one's lips always moving while chanting the Divine Name. Internally and externally the Sacred Name flowed like a never ending stream.

Life With the Relatives

Servants were not available in the coastal area for kitchen work and other such domestic chores as there was much more profitable work such as sewing fishing nets and manufactur-

ing coir. Not only that, the fisherfolk considered any job other than their hereditary work of fishing as something disgraceful. Because of this, any girl who had discontinued her studies would work day in and day out doing all the domestic chores. Besides that, they would often be sent to their relatives' houses to render service. It was the custom for the relatives to ask the parents of such girls for their services.

And so it was with Sudhamani. Her relatives insisted that she be given in service to their households. Finally, giving into their persistent disturbance regarding this matter, Sudhamani's parents were forced to send her to the home of her maternal grandmother. Thus it came to pass that Sudhamani spent the next four years playing the role of domestic servant in various relatives' homes.

Sudhamani's grandmother lived six kilometers to the south of Parayakadavu. The name of that place was Bhandaraturuttu. One could reach there either by travelling in a boat along the backwaters or by walking along the shore of the Arabian Sea. As one could imagine, either of these venues would have an intoxicating effect on little Sudhamani. Riding in the ferry boat, she would gaze ar the blue sky and shed tears of joy thinking of the blue-coloured Krishna. It became her habit to chant 'Aum' in consonance with the humming boat engine. She would focus her attention on the small ripples dancing on the water while visualizing the form of her Beloved there and imagining His divine sports. Before long she would enter into a state of devotional fervour and her soft 'Aum' would be transformed into devotional singing. Her fellow boat passengers would greatly enjoy the little one's melodious singing and were not at all surprised by her conduct as they had always considered her to be one from another world. Due to such practices, Sudhamani would never feel the distance or boredom of the travel.

But the joy of the boat journey was short-lived. One day when she asked her mother for the boat fare Damayanthi was quick to scold, "Who are you to travel in a boat? Are you a college girl? For you it is enough to walk." It was during this time

that Kasturi had commenced her college studies, a rarity among the coastal area. Damayanthi was thus a bit proud of this fact and would give enough money for all her daily expenses. For a parent's child to become a college student was really a great thing as most of the families were far too poor to send their children for advanced studies. Even if the parents could afford to send their children, often there was such a lack of interest and initiative that the idea was quickly abandoned. Such being the case it was no surprise that Damayanthi was showing a bit of vanity.

Sudhamani, being black and a mere servant, was unnoticed, uncared for and completely misunderstood by her own family. Yet even at this young age one could find her residing peacefully amidst prejudice and poverty' full of nothing else but Krishna. She was not at all displeased by the rude behaviour of her mother. Quite the contrary! The little one was happy to walk along the seashore to her grandmother's house. Singing and dancing in ecstacy alone in the solitude, what a blessing! The six kilometre walk became an inexpressible experience for the little Sudhamani who considered the ocean to be her own mother.

One can easily imagine the little one walking along the shore loudly singing while the ocean waves kept up the tune. Forgetting the outer world, soon her steps would become slower and slower. The sight of the dark blue ocean and blue-grey storm clouds overhead would steal away her mind. The roaring sound of the ocean resembled 'Aum' and invariably had a divinely intoxicating effect on Sudhamani. Seeing Krishna in the waves, sometimes she would try to embrace them! The ocean breeze was nothing but the soft caress of Sri Krishna. Sometimes she would cry aloud, "Krishna! Krishna .'".Getting deeply absorbed in that supreme state of devotion, she would move along the sand with faltering steps. Eventually, she would lose all external consciousness and fall to the sand.

Partially regaining her normal consciousness, Sudhamani would burst into tears and pray, 'Kanna, my dear Krishna.

come running! Where have You gone leaving me here? Why did You leave me on this unknown shore? Where am I? O Be loved Krishna, come running before the waves of this Ocean of Transmigration swallow me up! O Krishna, uplift this destitute from the sand of pleasures. Are You not the Saviour of Your devotees? Are You not knowing my heart's pain? What mistake have I committed for You to allow me to suffer like this? O Lord of all worlds, won't You show a little bit of compassion to this humble servant of Yours? Daily I am waiting to hear the melodious sound of Your divine flute playing. O Krishna, please come...please come!!"

After some time, she would return to a manageable state of mind and continue on her way along the seashore singing in ecstacy. Again the little one would be seen falling several more times on the sand oblivious to the world around her.

O Krishna, Ocean of Compassion,
Life's miseries are ever increasing.
There is no peace far the mind...
Alas, confusion is so much...

Forgiving all wrongs,
Wipe the sweat from my brow.
O Kanna, now I have no support other than
Thy worshipful Lotus Feet...

O Krishna, the throat is drying up,
The eyes are failing,
The feet are tired,
I am falling to the ground, O Krishna...

In this way, drinking the nectar of Supreme Love and Devotion, Sudhamani would somehow reach her grandmother's house only to confront a back-breaking workload. Yet, the young girl would contentedly chant the Names of Lord Krishna and carry on with her labours. As far as the little one was concerned, each and every moment of life whether

positive or negative was considered to be an opportunity given by the Supreme Lord to serve and remember Him.

Occasionally, Sudhamani would be sent to a grain mill some distance from her grandmother's house in order to husk rice paddy. Cheerfully she would make the journey all the while singing her favorite devotional songs. On the way to the granary, the little one had to pass through a section of the village where many families lived in the midst of dire poverty. Sudhamani, whose very' nature was compassion, would feel very dejected seeing their plight. While returning home after husking the paddy she used to give some rice away to those families who had been starving for days together. Sometimes her grandmother would detect the missing portion of rice and would think that Sudhamani had sold it in exchange for a snack. The grandmother would scold and beat the little one. However much Sudhamani was pressed she would never divulge the name of the family to whom the rice had been given. She thought that if she told it the grandmother would surely go and quarrel with them.

While staying at Bhandaraturuttu, Sudhamani would sometimes be sent to guard the newly sown paddy fields from crows and poultry. The field was in a distant place and, as was the habit of the little one, she turned every situation into a chance to remember God. This duty was a rare chance for her to be away from all family members and to spend time in solitude remembering and praying to the Lord. Each and every breath would carry' the sound of 'Krishna' with it. Each step would be taken remembering His Divine Form. Due to the intensity' of her love and devotion, sometimes the little one would be found collapsed near the field crying and crying in ecstacy.

One great solace for Sudhamani was that her grandmother was a devotee of Lord Krishna. There was a portrait of Krishna hanging on the wall which Sudhamani would stand in front of and sing devotional songs for a long time until duty' called her. During such occasions, her uncle Ratnadasan, who loved the little one very much, would bring a stool for her

to sit on while praying so that she did not have to stand for such a long time. Then the little one would say, ᵘOh, how can I sit when Krishna is standing!'' The portrait of the Lord was not a painted piece of paper for her, it was Krishna standing there in flesh and blood. For a true devotee there is no such thing as inert matter, everything is the manifested glory of the Lord.

Attracted by the heart capturing songs of Sudhamani, the neighbours used to come and listen to her. The little one's exalted way of singing would fill their minds with love and devotion. Gradually, they also learned Sudhmani's compositions and would sing them in their own shrine room. To prevent the cast of the evil eye,[2] Sudhamani's uncle would smear sacred ash which had been imbued with special prayers on the forehead of his niece.

Autumn, winter, spring and summer passed one by one. Sudhamani was now fourteen. She was sent to the house of Damayanthi's elder sister. As usual the litrle one toiled under a heavy work load all on her own. First she would boil the unhusked rice paddy and then dry it in the sun. The duties of cooking, cleaning and washing all the clothes were hers as well. All the children of this family were in college and considered it a shameful thing to do any household work. They had no faith in God and would tease the little one mercilessly for her devotional attitude. They would try to prevent her from singing devotional songs. Poor Sudhamani! What could she do against these heartless people? Hiding her face in her hands she would burst into tears when they finally temporarily succeeded in stopping her singing. Though externally silenced, no one could check the incessant flow of her heart towards her Beloved.

Due to the nearness of the ocean, all the waters surrounding the house were salty. In order to fetch drinking water, Sudhamani would row a small boat across the backwaters to the distant fresh water tap. Sometimes she would even act as boatman and fern' her relatives' children across the backwa-

[2] **A superstitious belief of this area.**

ters to school and college. With great pleasure she would ferry other people's children as well.

Sitting in the canoe on the return trip, the little one would greatly enjoy the natural scenery. Crying to her Lord without any hindrance, her longing heart's desire to see Krishna would increase tremendously on such occasions. She would converse with the tiny ripples rising up on the surface of the river saying, "O little waves, did any of you see my Krishna Who is the colour of a dark blue storm cloud? Have you ever heard the sweet, melodious music of His enchanting flute?" Seeing the little waves still rising up on the water Sudhamani would think that this was a negative reply. She would burst into tears thinking, Oh, these little waves are also in deep agony like me without seeing Krishna.' The little one perceived the reflection of her own excruciating pain of separation everywhere. Looking at Nature and crying aloud, she would implore, dark blue clouds of the infinite sky, where did you hide my beloved Krishna? O white cranes swiftly flying across the sky, are you going to Vrindavan?[3] If you happen to meet Krishna, please tell Him of this poor little girl who is always shedding tears thinking of Him!" Soon, Sudhamani would lose all external consciousness and sit in the boat motionless like a statue. Slowly regaining her normal state of awareness the little one would find herself still sitting in the boat which had drifted hither and thither. Because of these exalted spritual moods which would occur irrespective of time and place, there were occasions when Sudhamani had to face great dangers which could have easily stolen away her life. The following incident occurred while staving at her aunt's house.

One day little Sudhamani had finished the job of husking paddy and began rowing her tiny canoe back to the house. While rowing she looked around and enjoyed the natural scenery. Gazing at the sky she saw the dark blue clouds mov-

3.The place where Sri Krishna spent His childhood, where even today countless of His devotees stay.

ing across the horizon. This sight filled her innocent heart with the sweet memory of her beloved blue-coloured Krishna. The next instant the little one lost all outward awareness and was merged in samadhi.[4] The oar fell from her hands. Her eyes were fixed on the sky and oblivious to the surroundings, she remained sitting there in complete stillness. Now and then she would call out, 'Krishna, Krishna' but remained entirely lost to the world. The canoe moved into the current and was carried on a haphazard course. At that moment the sound of a large engined boat was heard. It was heading on a collison course with Sudhamam's tiny boat! The passengers in the big boat shouted in alarm and made a vain effort to arouse the little girl. People standing on the banks of the river shouted and some threw stones in the water around the boat. Just at the last moment the little one partially regained external consciousness and somehow managed to steer her boat clear of danger.

Another year passed and Sudhamani was now sent to the house of Damayanthi's eldest brother Anandan. The house was located in the town of Karunagappally about ten kilometres inland from Parayakadavu. With utmost sincerity and enthusiasm Sudhamani discharged her daily chores much to the delight of Anandan and his wife. Anandan's wife even gave the little one a pair of earrings as a reward for wholeheartedly performing her duties.

Compassion for the poor and needy was one of the outstanding features of the little one's character. Whether she was in her uncle's house, her aunt's house or her own family home, nothing could stop the little one from extending help to those in need. Many Muslim families lived around her uncle's house and most of them were very poor. The little one would pocket various articles from her uncle's house and secretly give these items to them. At first nobody noticed, but after some time she was discovered. They developed an aver-

[4] An advanced state of meditation when one's consciousness is completely unified with the Supreme Consciousness.

sion towards the little one and on several occasions Sudhamani received a heating from her auntie. Yet she never felt offended by her aunt's actions. She thought, 'Why should I feel offended? Aversion comes only when I take myself to be different from them. I never consider them to be separate. Even when I was in my own house they would beat me. Then what is new if I receive such treatment here as well?'

Although severely beaten on several occasions, the little one was not to be discouraged from showing mercy' towards the afflicted. She never stopped her habit of giving things to others. Such incidents show the immense patience, compassion and forbearance which were inseparable from Sudhamani's very nature. Every event in her life can be taken as a lesson and she also took it as such. Her future message of love was the continuation of a great and unique sacrifice which she undertook as her way of life.

Sudhamani's sharp intellect would easily penetrate anything and everything to extract the essential spiritual principles. All the trials and tribulations which she had to undergo would later be described as rare blessings bestowed by the Supreme to make her understand the ephemeral nature of the world and its relations. Later she told,

"From all these experiences I clearly understood that the world is full of sorrow. We have no true relations or relatives as everyone loves us only to fulfill their own selfish needs. Human beings love each other out of desire. Nobody loves us selflessly. Only God has such selfless love."

The little one clearly understood that to continue a close association with these people would be a great obstacle to her supreme goal in life. Finally she created a set of circumstances which would free her from this bondage. One morning she heatedly quarrelled with this family just to break the agreement and left the house. The relatives were so crude that they even took back all the gifts which they had presented to her previously, including the carrings. The little girl was sent home empty handed. Before leaving Sudhamani told, "One day a situation will arise where you will have to come to me begging. Until then I will never enter this house."

Later, after eleven years had passed, financial troubles plagued her uncle's family and they came to Idamannel requesting assistance from Sudhamani. Only then did she return to their house to perform the worship and thereby bestow her blessing. On that day, Sudhamani's aunt repented the past events and said, "Oh, I never imagined that the little one would become so great. How ruthlessly I scolded and beat her!"

The Supreme Lord is always keen to fulfill the promise of His true devotee. Even in the Great Epics of India we can find many such incidents which exemplify this. God is truly the servant of His devotees.

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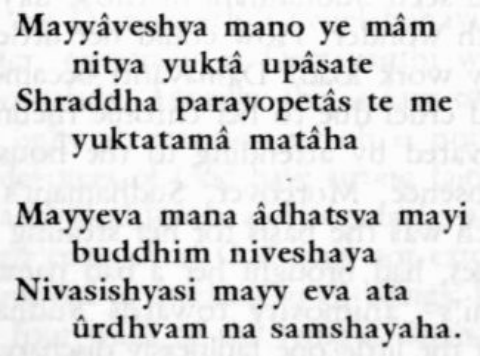
CHAPTER THREE

TEARS FOR KRISHNA

Having no butter and milk to offer to Thee, I will offer Thee a little of my pain. O Kanna, at Thy Feet I will offer the pearl drops of my tears.

-Mata Amritanandamayi-

Sri Bhagavan Uvacha:



The Blessed Lord said:

Those who, fixing their mind on Me, worship Me, ever steadfast, and endowed with supreme sraddha, they in My opinion are the best versed in Yoga.

Fix thy mind on Me only, place thy intellect in Me; (then) than shalt no doubt live in Me hereafter.

Srimad Bhagavad Gita
Chapter 12, Verses 2 & 8

Return to Idamannel

Returning to Idamannel from her uncle's house, Sudhamani. now aged around sixteen, became fully immersed in her spiritual practices while simultaneously attending to the mountainous burden of household chores. Even in this land of India the little one's tremendous passion for spiritual austerity against the greatest odds stands unique and unparalleled.

Her work, as it had always been, was worship to the Supreme. If anybody had seen Sudhamani in those days they would have gasped with wonder. How could her little body withstand such a heavy work load? Damayanti became even more hot-tempered and cruel due to her chronic rheumatism which had been aggravated by attending to the housework during Sudhamani's absence. Moreover, Sudhamani's compassionate nature, which was the basis for her stealing things from the relatives' houses, had brought her a bad name. This redoubled Damayanthi's animosity towards Sudhamani. Thus it was that even if the little one faultlessly discharged her household duties, Damayanthi would scold and beat her.

Despite such cruel treatment from her own mother, the little one held no grudge against her. In fact, years later Sudhamani would reverentially refer to Damayanthi as her spiritual Guru. Following are Sudhamani's own words:

"Damayanthi Amma was, in a way, my Guru. She inculcated diligence, devotion and discipline in me. She observed all of my actions meticulously. If there was even a little rubbish left over in the courtyard after sweeping she would beat me. When all the vessels were washed, she would scrutinize them and if there was even a slight trace of dirt, she would scold me. While sweeping the ground, if even a single stick of the broom happened to fall down inadvertently, she would not spare me. If even a speck of dust or ash happened to fall into the cooking pot punishment would follow. Mother, who expected her daughters to do their prayers early in the morning, would not hesitate to pour a pot of water in our faces, particularly on mine, if we were late to rise due to exhaustion. When I plucked grass for the cows, she would watch me from a distance to see if I indulged in gossip with others. She would even beat me with a wooden pestle used for pounding rice. Witnessing such actions of my mother, even the local people would tell her, 'Please do not punish her like this. She will have to be given in marriage some day!' Bur all the while I realized that such experiences were only for my own good."

Readers of the Holy Mother's biography may fee! a bit aghast by Damayanthi's cruel behaviour towards her own daughter, especially as Damayanthi was previously depicted as a pious lady. Actually, this is easy to understand when seen in the light of devotion which is not based on knowledge. Many devotees of God have strong faith and reverence for the Gods and Goddesses and regularly perform religious rites, but their concept of God does not extend any further. God is not perceived as dwelling in all beings, but rather He is limited to the four walls of the temple. Such devotees perform religious rites with an aim to fulfill their desires or to satisfy God. Their view of religion and worship has nothing to do with character building or eradication of their own negative tendencies. These devotees have no desire to realize God or Self as their Supreme Goal. They worship God because their fathers have done so or out of fear of sin. However, there is another category' of devotees who perceive God as all-pervasive and serve Him as such. They renounce everything and surrender their whole being at the Lotus Feet of the Lord. Their ultimate goal in life is to realise and become one with the Supreme Reality. Damayanthi belonged to the first category of devotees and thus there is no wonder if she had a limited vision of God and spirituality'.This was reflected in her harsh actions cowards the little one.

Sometimes when Damayanthi was about to beat Sudhamani for some reason or other, the little one would catch hold of her hand. Though small, Sudhamani was very strong. Unable to release her hand from Sudhamani's grip, she would then try to kick her. The little one would play her role most effectively and catch hold of Damayanthi's leg as well. Much more interesting was Damayanthi's next move. Finding no other way to punish her daughter, the mother would bite her. There are even occasions when Damayanthi would hack Sudhamani with a machete used to open coconuts. The mother would pile vulgar abuse upon the innocent little one without restraint.

Sudhamani could be very bold and impertinent at times when it came to dealing with her mother. Sometimes if Damayanthi demanded, “Don’t speak!" she would immediately retort, “I will speak!" If Damayanthi told, “Don't do it!" Sudhamani would unhesitatingly answer back, “I will do it!" But the more she retaliated, the harsher would be the punishment. Damayanthi would curse her daughter, “Let this defiant girl be damned!” She would continue, “If she grows up like this, she will surely bring a bad reputation to the family. O God, why are You not putting an end to her life?”

For her part, Sudhamani was not at all bothered by her mother’s antagonistic way of raising her. In the little one’s eyes all people were seen equally. Even from childhood, she would call elderly men as ‘father’ and all elderly women ‘mother’. This further irritated her parents who considered her peculiar way of addressing others as a disgrace to the family. They would scold her saying, “Is it proper for you to call all these dirty people your father and mother?” Sudhamani’s reply would come, “I have never seen my real Father and Mother. Therefore all are my father and mother.”

The little one was prohibited from applying sacred ash to her forehead. The family members would taunt her saying, “Hey girl, are you going to become a sannyasin?" Sudhamani was not even permitted to dress like ordinary girls? If she applied Vermillion[1] to her forehead or wore a chequered blouse or clean jacket, punishment would quickly follow. Mockingly they would ask her, “Why do you wear these coloured clothes and apply the Vermillion? Who are you making a show for?" They would instruct her, “Girls should live with utmost politeness."

What was more amazing than their deplorable treatment was Sudhamani’s unwavering tolerance for whatever befell her. Though at times she was saucy, one could never find an iota of hatred behind it. Later when asked the little one would just say, “Damayanthi was not punishing me. It was only due

[1] A sacred red marking worn by Hindus.

to her limited vision that she treated me poorly. All those trials led me along the correct path. Therefore, I have no hatred towards her."

As if this was not enough suffering for poor Sudhamani, God blessed her with an elder brother, Subhagan, who was a veritable terror not only to Sudhamani but to the family and villagers as well. He was an avowed atheist and further held that women should be absolutely quiet and reserved. His hot temper was well known and Sudhamani became his frequent victim. He would not allow Sudhamani to make friends with any girls her own age as he held the strong conviction that this would ruin her character. If Sudhamani went to fetch fresh drinking water for the family she would always go alone. If she happened to meet up with some other girls she could count on receiving a severe beating from Subhagan. As it was, this rule was much to the little one's liking. She much rather preferred to be alone remembering God without any hindrance.

In those days there was only one water tap for the whole village and it ran on wind power. There would always be a long queue for getting water from the pipe and each one would wait their turn. The village women would gather there with their clay pots and Sudhamani was not an exception. Sometimes the villagers would have to stand there for hours together waiting for the wind to blow. If there was a long queue Sudhamani would have to leave her pots in the queue in order to go and gather grass for the cows. The other ladies, knowing the little one's piety and hard-working nature, would lovingly fill her pot and keep it aside for her.

As mentioned previously, Sudhamani would visit the neighbouring houses to collect vegetable scraps and rice gruel for the cows. If there was any delay she would enter the shrine room and sing a few devotional songs or meditate. Then she would spend some time with the elderly ladies of the house. Sudhamani would lovingly inquire about their well being and listen intently to their tales of woe. It seemed that even their own children would maltreat and neglect them just because of their old age and infirmity. Thus Sudhamani wit-

nessed early in life the transience and selfishness of human relationships. Whenever possible the little one would take these old women home with her and give them a good hot water bath, a nourishing meal and dress them in her family members clothes.

If the little one came to know of anyone who was going without food she would at least give them the raw foodstuffs from her own house. Sometimes she would bring home small children who she would find wandering around. They were not being properly attended or nourished by their own parents. Seeing this Sudhamani would extend the necessary care before returning them home.

One day Sudhamani was caught red-handed while taking some foodstuffs to be given to a poor man. Though severely beaten, she would not desist from her compassionate activities. She continued in the same way unknown to her parents whenever she saw that help was needed. On another occasion Sudhamani saw a family starving for want of food. Finding nothing else, she gave them a gold bangle belonging to her mother which they could sell for enough money to acquire the desperately needed food. When her father came to know of this, in a fit of fury he tied her to the trunk of a tree and mercilessly beat her until her tender body bled. Though treated like this, the little one remained courageous and forgiving. She would be overheard praying for God to pardon the terrible actions committed out of ignorance by her misguided relatives.

Sudhamani would think while sitting in solitude, ¨O Krishna, what kind of world is this? Even the mother who gives birth treats the child with no kindness. Even she has no pure love for her own family. Where can I find selfless and pure love in this world? Is any love that I see truly genuine? Is it not a mere delusion?' Sometimes sitting in the family shrine room she would burst into tears thinking of all this and would cry out loud, "Krishna, Krishna! I have none in this world but You. My mind is always running after You yearning to see Your Divine Form. Will You not take me with You? O Krishna, please come running!" '

During this period an elderly man who was a distant relative of the family came to live at Idamannel. He no longer had any family or relatives and was in very poor health. He was unable to even walk. Being completely bedridden his nature calls were done on the bed itself. Without being asked, Sudhamani immediately began attending to this old man and took complete responsibility for serving him. The other family members would barely look at the old man let alone take up any of the workload. Thus, in addition to her domestic chores we find the little one sincerely and patiently attending to his needs. She would wash his clothes, give him a hot water bath each day, remove his excreta and urine, and administer the prescribed medicines at the proper time. Though Sudhamani manifested an extraordinary abundance of noble virtues, no one in the family took any notice much less understood or appreciated the little one's all-embracing attitude towards life. It is nothing other than divine paradox that the little one received only heaps of abase for any and all that she did.

While she was doing her work it was Sudhamani's habit to remember Krishna by pretending as though she herself was Krishna, Radha, the Gopis or someone else associated with Krishna's life.

Sometimes while doing the cooking her heart would be filled with the form of Krishna's mother, Yashoda, who would churn the milk and nurse her babe Krishna. While Sudhamani readied her brothers and sisters for school, she would imagine that she was adorning Krishna, Balarama and the Gopas[2] before they went out to graze the cows. Perceiving all this with her inner eye she would shed tears of joy. When the little one went to the market to purchase household goods she recalled the Gopis who used to walk along the streets of Vrindavan selling milk and butter. Instead of calling out, "Milk, butter..." they would call out "Krishna, Madhava, Govinda, Achyuta...!" So intense was their devotion!

[2] The cowherd boys of Vrindavan.

The Gopis' pure love and devotion for Sri Krishna was always a source of great inspiration for Sudhamani. At times she would imagine herself to be Radha, the beloved of Sri Krishna. The mere thought of Radha was enough to steal the little one's mind and soon her awareness of the outer world ebbed away. She would become totally absorbed in that divine mood and would sing, dance and shed tears in estacy.

O dark-coloured One,
My eyes are pitifully burning for the sight of
Thy Feet. O lotus-eyed One, come running
With the cows and the music of the flute.

For how many days have I been calling Thee?
Hast Thou not even a bit of compassion?
What great error have I committed?
Art Thou not the Lover of devotees?

Before I fall down crying deign to come with Thy Flute,
Unable to live as I am without seeing Thee
Who art the sole Reality, come, come...

Fulfil ler of desires, Cause of all,
O dark-coloured One, come, come...
Without wasting time and increasing my sorrow.
O Embodiment of Compassion, come, come...

While going to fetch water, Sudhamani would remember the Gopis who would go to the river Yamuna carrying pots on their head to collect water. As the little one washed her family's clothes she would sing devotional songs and imagine that she was washing the silken robes of Krishna and the Gopis. After hanging the clothes to dry, Sudhamani would watch them fluttering in the wind and think, 'O, see how beautifully Krishna's golden yellow silk robes are dancing in the breeze!' While collecting grass for the cows and feeding

them she would intensely think of Krishna who daily acted as shepherd boy to the cows in the meadows and forests of Vrindavan. Sudhamani would revel in the memory of the sportings of the divine Cowherd Boy and the Gopis.

Sudhamani's favourite time of the day was dusk, when she would wade through the backwaters looking for the domestic animals like ducks, goats and cows which had gone astray during the day. While doing so she would remember Krishna who used to search for the cows and calves which had wandered away from the herd. If she heard any devotional singing, which is quite common in India during the twilight hour, she would stand motionless, transported to another realm. Occasions were not rare when this would happen and then it would be an irritated family member who would go out searching for the little one.

Though one would always find Sudhamani engaged in some work or other, her mind was not at all in the work. The little one's mind was filled with longing and always chasing after Krishna. His Sacred Names were ever on her lips and the very word 'Krishna' would bring tears to her eyes. Because the little one was always carrying water, washing the family's clothes or wading through the backwaters, her simple garment would remain drenched all the 24 hours. In her own words, "I wanted so badly to see my clothes dry! Even though I had so much work I would pray to God for more so that I could be ever busy in dedicating my actions to Him. Carrying water for cooking and steaming pots of rice gruel on my head, the hair on that spot fell out owing to the weight and heat of the pots."

Whatever Sudhamani was doing, one could notice her lips moving. Nobody understood that this was due to the little one's incessant repetition of the Lord's Name. One day her younger brother Satheesh, who had picked up the elder family members' habit of verbally abusing Sudhamani, cuttingly remarked, "Always moving one's lips is a symptom of madness!" Though she overheard Satheesh's comment, Sudhamani was unperturbed. Nevertheless when Satheesh would

have a severe asthma attack Sudhamani would carry him on her hip all the way to the hospital, even though there were others among the family who could have more easily done so. Nobody would care about his asthmatic condition except for the innocent girl who was always waiting for a chance to selflessly serve and extend help to others.

It would be late in the night when Sudhamani finished her chores. Not a single light remained burning in her own house or the neighborhood. Even at this late hour Sudhamani would loudly sing to her Lord in the family shrine room. Damayanti and Subhagan would tonguclash her for singing in the darkness and disturbing their sleep. Her elder brother Subhagan would remark, “Why do you shout and howl like this? Is it so God can hear it in the heavens? Is your God deaf? Though she had to suffer punishment and scoldings, Sudhamani was not to be deterred from singing to God in the silent hours of the night. Another night Subhagan came angrily to the shrine room and criticized her for singing in the darkness. Quick came the little one's reply, “You behold only the external lamp but within rne burns a lamp which never gets extinguished!" Needless to say, the inner significance of her remark was lost on the callous Subhagan.

Sudhamani had a fear that God would punish her mother, father and brother for beating her while she chanted devotional songs. Therefore, she would sing softly to make them abstain from doing such evil actions. Deeply dejected by the obstacles created by her family, Sudhamani would weep while she sat in the shrine room. Then their next objection would be voiced. They insisted that it was a sin for her to weep while singing devotional songs and that this would cause them great danger. It made no difference what the little one did, they would find fault. Poor little Sudhamani! She silently endured everything and dissolved all her miseries in the sweet memory of Sri Krishna.

Even from her childhood Sudhamani would never tell her sorrows to any human being. The only one who she unburdened herself to was Lord Krishna. Sudhamani was also in the

habit of talking to the animals and to Nature imagining that Krishna was hearing her every word. Perceiving everything as Krishna she would go on conversing with them. The cows were Krishna attentively listening to her words as far as the little one was concerned. If a cow happened to be lying down resting, the little one would also lie down leaning against its body contentedly thinking that she was lying on Krishna's lap.

Looking at the stars, the moon and the flowering trees Sudhamani would ask, "O my friends, have you seen my Krishna? O gentle breeze, have you ever caressed His enchanting form? O glittering stars and silent moon, are you also in search of Him? If you find Him, please tell Him that this poor Sudhamani is also waiting to see Him."

Did anyone of you see my darling Kannan?
You can see Him, but He never appears before my eyes...

The mark of sandalepaste on the forehead,
The beauty of the yellow silk robes.
The waving locks of hair with the peacock feather...
Oh, when will I behold all this?

Of what use is this body and this life of mine?
All my good fortune has ended...
For how much longer will these sufferings persist?

The "Mother Sea' was also one among Sudhamani's best friends, and she considered the ocean to be her own Mother. Whenever she got the chance the little one would slip off to the seaside and pour out her heart's miseries while gazing at the vast expanse of water. The dark blue colour would remind her of her blue Beloved and before long her external awareness would be lost.

Meanwhile, Sudhamani had observed some of the neighbors earning their living by doing tailoring jobs. Prompted by the idea to help others with the money which she earned from tailoring, the little one now cherished a desire to learn stitching. In this way, she could avoid the unpleasantness of having to take things from her house in order to help others. Full of hope, Sudhamani expressed her wish to her parents but Damayanthi's reply was quite discouraging, "You are not going to be sent to learn stitching, but will soon be given in marriage to a coconut tree climber!" The coconut tree climbers were a low class of people in Kerala whose sole source of income was gained only through the plucking of coconuts from trees for people. Sudhamani had often been caught stealing coconuts which Damayanthi thought was, of course, for her to eat but actually it was always given to the needy locals. Damayanthi in her anger was referring to this only.

Finally, due to Sudhamani's persistent demand, her parents allowed her to learn sewing for one hour a day under one condition. She should complete all the domestic chores before leaving the house to learn stitching. One would be astounded if they would have seen little Sudhamani's routine on those days. Somehow she would manage to complete the chores which had to be done before noontime and then race off to her stitching class. On some days the other girls who were studying stitching, knowing Sudhamani's plight, would come and help her finish her chores. In the scorching heat of the midday sun, Sudhamani would walk two or three kilometres to the place where she studied. After one hour she would dash home in time to serve the noon meal.

The rest of the day continued as usual with her grueling schedule. The only moments she had for her most important duty', prayer and meditation, was in the silent hours of the night. Crying and crying the little one would get merged in that God-intoxicated state. Returning to a semi-conscious mood she would drift off to sleep.

The little one's patience, endurance and seemingly inexhaustible energy, which continues to this day, was miraculous. Whatever amount of work was heaped on her she would do happily without murmuring a complaint. Sudhamani took it as her birthright and dharma to extend help to anyone and everyone without being asked. Later she explained, "My joy was in seeing others' happiness. I never thought of my own comfort and workload. Whenever I got an opportunity to serve and assist others I tried my best to discharge it with utmost sincerity and love."

Initially Sudhamani was learning stitching in two separate places. After some time she chose to attend the classes which were given in a parochial workshop in a nearby chapel. The little one quickly learned the mechanics of sewing and began doing small tailoring jobs for the poor ladies in the neighborhood. At first, she refused to accept money for the services rendered as this was not her way of doing things. But when her parents refused to pay the course fees for her stitching classes she was compelled to accept wages for her labour. Thus she managed to pay the class fee and the remaining amount she used to help the destitute villagers. She was also able to buy a few essential items for doing her tailoring jobs. Sudhamani was adept at tailoring and earned a good wage. Without giving even a paise[3] to her house she would use her earnings to help the poor.

While sewing in the chapel workshop Sudhamani would sing devotional songs. Immersed in that mood she would shed tears which would fall on the sewing machine. The priest of that church was an elderly and pious man and took quick notice of Sudhamani's remarkable character. While all the other girls gossiped Sudhamani was merged in her devotional singing. The priest was deeply touched by this and Sudhamani became very dear to him. This created jealousy in the minds of the other girls yet the little one would show affection to them just as before without a trace of animosity.

[3] Equivalent of a penny.

Sathccsh would always accompany his sister to class and would stay around the church grounds or sit in a corner. One day during prayer time Sudhamani asked, “Why are you not participating in the prayer?” He replied, “are we not Hindus?” Then Sudhamani told him, “You ask the priest if you can also participate in the prayer,” to which the priest happily agreed. From then onwards Sathccsh would always attend the prayer session.

When her sewing was completed Sudhamani would go to the church graveyard to do her embroidery work. She loved the solitude there. Sitting in the graveyard she would talk to the departed souls. “How is your life? Where are you living? are you happy there? Do you have any feelings?” She used to feel herself to be in their company and she would console them. A demised friend of Sudhamani’s elder sister Kasturi was buried in that cemetery. This girl had shown boundless love for Sudhamani even when the family members were terribly abusing the little one. Perhaps this was another reason why Sudhamani would visit the graveyard. Sensing the misery of the departed ones, she would shed tears. She would talk to the souls drifting along with their subtle bodies and would sing for their peaceful rest in a heart rending tune. Sometimes Sudhamani would sit in meditation and enter into samadhi while sitting in the silence and stillness of the Christian graveyard.

If there was any time remaining after completing her embroidery work, Sudhamani would return to the chapel. The chapel had an inner apartment which seemed like a cave. In that dim light, she would gaze upon the crucified form of Jesus Christ. Seeing the form of Jesus oh the cross, she felt that it was her beloved Krishna. Immediately, she would become enraptured. Coming down to the plane of normal consciousness. she would shed tears thinking of the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and Krishna. She would think, "O how They have sacrificed everything for the world. People turned against Them but still They loved them. If They have done it, then why can't I? There is nothing new in it.’

Sudhamani was acutely aware of the dire poverty of the villagers. Seeing their sorrows and sufferings, the little one would weep in the silent hours she spent in the shrine room. She would pray, “O God, is this life? People are toiling day in and day out just for a bit of food to satisfy their hunger. O Krishna, why do you allow them to starve? Why do they become afflicted with diseases? Everywhere I turn I come face to face with selfishness and the people’s sufferings caused by it. Youngsters pray for a long life and children pray for an early death for their aged father and mother. Nobody is at all interested to care for the elderly. O Lord, what kind of a world is this? What is the purpose of creating such a world? O Krishna, what is the solution for all this?” Such were the prayers of the innocent girl.

Thus, three years had passed when Sudhamani decided to discontinue her tailoring classes considering them to be a hindrance for her spiritual practices which she wanted to intensify. Within a few weeks, she stopped attending classes. The priest was also transferred at that time to another parish. Before he left, he sent a few of the girls from the class to Idamannel to express his wish to bid farewell to Sudhamani. Accompanied by Satheesh, she went to visit the priest for the last time. Gazing at the little one, the priest burst into tears and wept like a small child. Sudhamani stood with subdued emotions. The priest said, “Daughter, I am going to give up this job now. I have decided to lead the life of a sannyasin. ” As Sudhamani and Satheesh were about to leave, the priest said to Satheesh, “See, Sudhamani will become great in the future. ” Perhaps the virtuous priest had already envisioned the shining divinity within the little one.

Having now mastered stitching, Sudhamani expressed her wish to have a machine of her own. Damayanthi scolded her for being ambitious but Sugunanandan promised several times that he would get a machine for her. However, this sewing machine never materialized. Sudhamani decided “I won’t ask for a machine again. Only if God gives one shall I use it.” After several years, when devotees began flocking to

Idamannel, one among her Dutch devotees named Peter purchased a sewing machine for her and she was reminded of her vow. God cares for each and every need of His true devotee.

All the children except Sudhamani were studying either in secondary school or college. They all were light in complexion and fair looking. Sudhamani's dark blue complexion and hard working nature made them all look down upon the little one as a mere servant. She was not even given enough clothing. Seeing all these hardships of young Sudhamani and the antagonistic approach of her parents and elder brother, the villagers would say, "Sudhamani was purchased in Quilon[4] in exchange for some paddy husk." Her parents would take all the children to the temples for festivals and other ceremonies but always ignored Sudhamani and left her behind.

One day, Sudhamani received a chequered blouse and happily donned it. Seeing this, her elder brother ordered her to remove it. Snatching it from her hand, he set it on fire right in front of her and shouted, "Only to attract the attention of others do you wear these coloured clothes'" On another occasion, Damayanthi abused the little one for wearing a yellow silk jacket owned by one of her sisters. Thenceforth, she decided that she would only wear the clothes provided by the Lord, i.e., old, worn out ones discarded by others. Sudhamani would cut these clothes up and make a blouse and skirt from them. She used the loose threads from an old clothesline to stitch these scraps of clothing together and felt happy not to be a burden to anyone. About those days she said, "Without having proper thread, scissors or a sewing machine I would somehow manage to stitch my own clothes!"

* * * * *

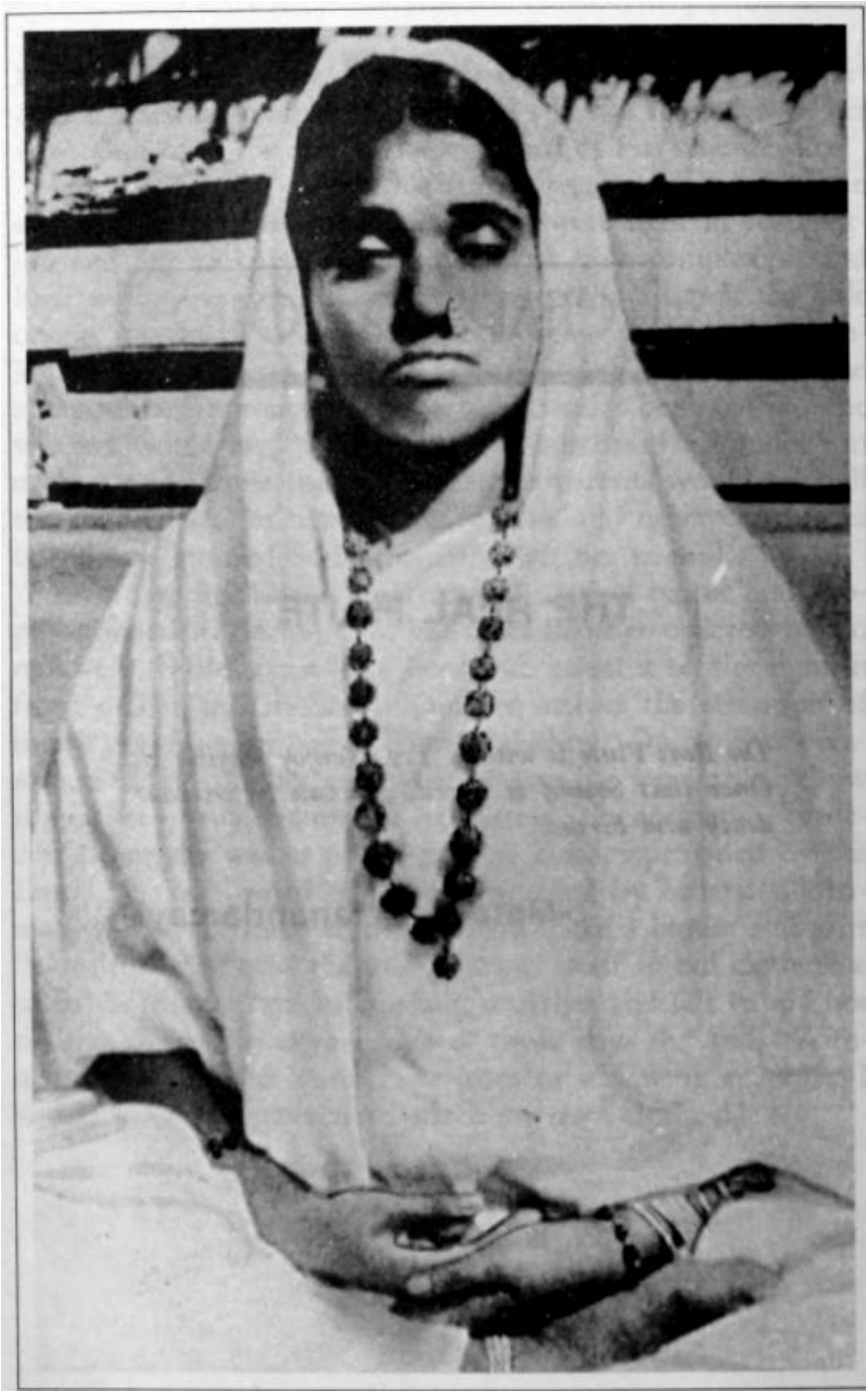
[4] A coastal dty 35 kilometres south of Paravakadavu

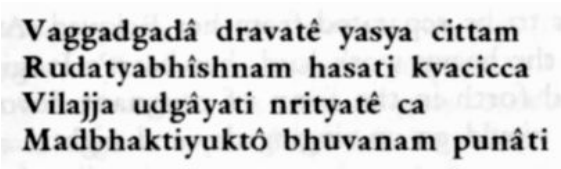
CHAPTER FOUR

THE REAL FLUTE

The Real Flute is within. Try to enjoy playing It. Once that Sound is heard, one can be without death and birth...

-Mata Amritanandamayi-





The devotee whose voice is choked with emotion, whose heart melts out of Love, who sobs again and again, and at times begins to laugh, and shaking off bashfulness begins to sing loudly and dance, sanctifies the whole world.

SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM
SKANDA X, CANTO XIV, VERSE 24

Spiritual glory and the related behaviour of a God-Realized Soul are far beyond the realm or recognition of an ordinary human being's consciousness. Some people consider the thirst for God as madness, others call it psychological repression and still others refuse to accept its existence as a possibility. Whatever the case may be, the Great Souls remain unperturbed. They never heed the senseless remarks of skeptics and critics who are not to be blamed for their limited perception of the subtle realms of consciousness. Does the physicist cease to exist because the man on the street is skeptical of the exis- tence of sub-atomic particles and their benefits? Is he troub- led by their baseless criticism?

There is no wonder that the above mentioned attitudes prevailed in the case of Sudhamani. When she reached her late teens she was immersed in an unbroken stream of spiritual awareness. Her devotion to Sri Krishna was indescribably intense. Sudhamani would spontaneously and naturally ascend from one plane of consciousness to the next. It was heart

breaking for her to be separated from her Beloved. As if to compensate for the heavy work load, her heart's longing incessantly poured forth in the form of poignant devotional songs which she would go on singing day and night.

> *A rainbow without colours, a flower without fragrance, when such is my heart, why cry for compassion?*
>
> *Life has become full of coldness without even a trace of warmth like a veena which has no sweet melody,but sorrowful silence alone...*
>
> *Can the lotus flowers in a small rivulet deep within the forest blossom where the rays of the Sun cannot reach?*
>
> *Seeing the clouds in the sky, the peacock spreads its wings to dance, but in vain, and a chataka bird[1] waits for drops of water...*

Unable to grasp the significance of her rapturous devotional moods, Sudhamani's parents and elder brother would chastise and torture her mercilessly. They were convinced that all her godly activities were symptoms of some mental weakness and depression.

Sudhamani now spent her days and nights meditating, singing and repeating the Divine Name. Oftentimes she would lock herself in the family shrine room and dance in ecstacy much to the displeasure of her elder brother. At other times she would be seen crying overwhelmed with the pain of separation, and later she would be found unconscious in the

[1] It is told that the chataka bird will drink only raindrops that fall during the rains. It does not relish any other water. The idea is that both the peacock and the chataka feel Happy at the sight of clouds but become miserable in the absence of the rain. Likewise, waiting for God alone to make us happy seems to be in vain after prolonged search and spiritual practice not yielding its fruit.

sand. One can only wonder how it was possible for the little one's love for Krishna to increase any more but this love of hers knew no bounds Her heart's gate stood wide open and Sudhamani eagerly awaited her Lord's arrival. How is it possible to describe the intensity of the little one's dedication and self-surrender?

Sudhamani had an unquenchable thirst to hear the tales of Sri Krishna and if she ever overheard someone narrating such stories her attention was immediately absorbed in the account of her Lord and she would enter into samadhi. Long after the story' had ended Sudhamani would sit motionless in that place. By now the villagers found nothing strange or surprising in her otherworldly behaviour. At other times Sudhamani would call small children aside and encourage them to enact the stories associated with Krishna. She would watch all their plays with tears in her eyes and during their story telling the little one would imagine that Krishna was sitting by her side narrating the same. Forgetting the circumstances she would hug the small children thinking they were really Krishna. Unaccustomed to such behaviour and unfamiliar with Sudhamani's unusual moods, the youngsters would become frightened. It became the innocent girl's habit to worship small children by offering naivedyam[2] and eatables while singing prayers, genuinely seeing them as Sri Krishna.

If anybody happened to be awake in the silent hours of the night they could hear the heartbroken supplications of the little one appealing to her Lord,

"'Krishna, Krishna! My life's goal! When will I behold Your beautiful Form? Will my life and all my effort to see You end in vain? Are my prayers to become united with You unheard and unattainable? O Krishna, it is told that You are full of compassion for Your devotees. Have I displeased your merciful heart? Am I undeserving of being Your servant? For

[2] **A meal offered to God or the diety in a temple before being given to the devotees to eat.**

how many days will these prayers go unanswered? Do you feel no compassion for this lowly, forsaken child? O Kanna, have You also abandoned me? Where are You?...Where are You?..."

Finally she would collapse on the ground but her nights remained sleepless. She waited and waited without closing her eyes expecting that the Lord would come at any moment.

Sometimes Sudhamani would sculpt an image of Krishna out of clay and offer worship to it. She would mentally confide to her Beloved, 'See, nobody has taught me how to serve You and how to worship You. Please forgive my errors!' Then for lack of flowers, she would offer sand at the feet of the image. When the worship was over she would feel that the real Krishna had arrived and was standing right in front of her. With a trembling body and tear-filled eyes Sudhamani would become overwhelmed with devotion and prostrate again and again before the clay image. The next moment she would feel chat Krishna was about to run away and in a haste the little one would jump forward to catch hold of Him. Then she would realize that everything was only her imagination and that the clay idol was still only clay. This would make her burst into tears and sobbing at her pitiful plight she would go on imploring, "Krishna, Krishna! Please come and bless this one who is being torn into pieces with longing for Your vision. Is this all to test my love for You? Why do You hesitate? O Kanna, I can endure any torment except this separation from You. O Krishna, has Your heart lost all its compassion?"

Sudhamani was not to be discouraged. Full of optimism and anticipation, this fisherfolk girl waited and waited for the arrival of her Lord. Sometimes she considered herself to be the beloved of Krishna while at other times she was His servant. This unlettered girl, who hadn't studied past the fourth grade much less any scriptures, Vedas or Upanishads, became the embodiment of Supreme Devotion to Lord Krishna. Different aspects of Supreme Devotion spontaneously mani-

fested in young Sudhamani.

At this juncture, the financial affairs of the family took a sharp turn for the worse as Sugunanandan suffered a great loss in his fish marketing business. Damayanthi and the other family members became very desperate. One day Damayanthi told Sudhamani, “Why is God giving sorrow to us? Daughter, pray for your father. All his businesses have ended in failure. Sudhamani thought, ‘O Krishna, how does sorrow begin? What is the root cause of it? Mother is dejected because she desires to get happiness from her husband and wishes to live comfortably. Is it not desire which brings unhappiness? O darling Krishna, let me not get entangled in it! If I depend on human beings who are immersed in desire and ignorance then surely I will also become sorrowful. O Krishna, let my mind always cling to Your Lotus Feet!’

During this time, despite their financial trouble, Sudhamani's parents decided to somehow get her married. It should be mentioned here that Damayanthi was very particular about the raising of her four daughters and her self-conceit (pride) on this point was no secret among the villagers. Her daughters should be perceived as upstanding and virtuous among the communin’. If that was lost, then everything was lost as far as Damayanthi was concerned. Towards this end, Damayanti brought up her daughters with utmost discipline. They were not permitted to talk to any men, especially those in their youth. In those days all four sides of Idamannel were surrounded by water and Damayanthi had a fence built around the house for further protection from any intruders. Even then she was not satisfied and so she raised a dog inside the house in order to give warning if anybody came near. If the dog barked she would call Subhagan to look and see who it was. If it was a stranger or a young man the door would not be opened. Damayanthi was always worried about her grown-up daughters. Thus her eagerness to be rid of Sudhamani, a big part of her burden, became a pressing concern.

Sugunanandan and Subhagan found a suitable bridegroom for Sudhamani and a day was arranged for the first

meeting to take place as was the custom in India. This way the parents could make sure that the couple liked each other before the marriage. All this was arranged without Sudhamani's knowledge or consent. Not only that, this conspiracy was planned to take place in another house far away from Idamannel. On the chosen day, a lady from that house came to Sudhamani's home on the pretext of employing the little one in a tailoring job. She asked Sudhamani to accompany her to her house in order to take all the measurements for her daughters skirts and blouses.

When Sudhamani arrived at that house she understood that their intention was entirely different. The lady who had brought Sudhamani gave her a glass of tea and said, "Look here Sudhamani, there is a person sitting in the next room. Give this tea to him." This is the customary' way of introducing a bride to her groom. Clearly knowing their secret intent, Sudhamani in a serious tone replied, "I cannot. I have come to take measurements, not to serve tea." Saying this, she walked out of the house. Returning home, she told Damayanthi about the incident. Only then did she understand that all the arrangements had in fact been made by her own parents and elder brother.

Another marriage proposal came for Sudhamani. This time it was arranged for the bridegroom and his party' to come to Idamannel thinking this may be a safer setting. When the prospective husband arrived, Damayanthi sweetly asked Sudhamani to bring some bananas for him. In the guests' presence the little one retorted, "I won't do it! If you want, you can go buy bananas for him!" That was the end of that proposal.

But the parents would not give up their idea. Another proposal came for Sudhamani and it was again arranged for the groom to visit Idamannel. Beforehand, Damayanthi came to Sudhamani and pleaded, even shedding tears, "Daughter, please don't bring a bad reputation upon us. Please act politely to your future husband." When the expectant youth arrived to meet Sudhamani he sat quietly in the drawing room. Sudhamani was busy in the kitchen pounding dried red

chillies with a wooden pestle. She had already decided to face the situation in a more crude way than before. Holding the pestle with both hands like a soldier ready to attack his enemy with a bayonet, Sudhamani stood screaming through the kitchen window threatening him, waving the pestle and making ridiculous gestures. Damayanthi nearly fainted from shame, but the little one was not ready to give up so easily. She continued her drama until the bridegroom's party fled the house thinking that she was insane. Shortly thereafter, Sudhamani received her daily quota of kicks and blows, but in a harsher manner.

After this incident, the little one made a decision that if the parents again disturbed her with marriage proposals she would quit the house and continue her devotional practices in a cave or some other lonely place. In this matter of marriage the little one was most intolerant, but she had strong faith that her parents would not make another attempt for some time.

It is hard to imagine how the family's ill treatment of the little one could get any worse, but it did. Unwilling to endure the situation any longer, Sudhamani decided to run away from home. On the same day, a piece of paper blown by the wind fell right in front of her. She picked it up and to her astonishment she found that it was a newspaper clipping which reported a terrible account of what had happened to a girl who had run away from home. Taking this as an obvious communication from God, Sudhamani gave up the idea of leaving the house.

On another occasion, due to the unrighteous harassment by her family members, she decided to put an end to her life by jumping into the sea. The next moment she thought, 'Who is dying? Who is taking birth? Who can harass a true devotee of the Lord?' This strong conviction completely changed her mind.

During those days of intense sadhana, Sudhamani could not sleep in any other house or eat food prepared in a worldly

person's kitchen. If she happened to eat such food, she would become extremely restless or would vomit. Because of this, most days Sudhamani would fast. If she tried to stay in some other house where worldly people had slept, she would not get a moments rest. Yet, she was not bothered about sleep as she preferred to stay awake and meditate or call on her Beloved. She still had a fear of falling asleep because she was sure that Krishna would come at that moment and she would miss the long awaited Vision of His Divine Form.

Even at this stage, Sudhamani somehow managed to discharge her household duties without fail. Because of her continuous and toilsome work, the villagers nicknamed her 'Kaveri'. Kaveri was an ideal character endowed with ail virtues. Even if she was ill, she would be seen going from house to house selling milk. Seeinig the little one's never ending hardships and her noble qualities, the villagers had immense respect and love for this pious fishergirl.

The bitter experiences of life which she had to face and the rigorous environment in which she grew up convinced Sudhamani of the fleeting and selfish nature of worldly life. Deep and serious contemplation of life and its goal would occupy her mind. Referring to the mystery of life, Sudhamani would think, O God, do You not see all these sorrows and sufferings? Am I alone in this world? Who is my real relative? Who is my Father and who is my Mother? Where is the Truth in all of this? If one takes a human body, is one destined to suffer?' Thinking this, the innocent little one would shed tears and sincerely pray to her Lord.

Sudhamani always had sympathy for the ordinary people who craved for the momentary pleasures of worldly life. She would pray for them, 'O Lord, please save those who suffer due to ignorance mistaking the ephemeral world to be something great. Please give them right knowledge.'

Cows were very dear to Damayanthi. Even if the family members had to suffer, she would not allow the cows to undergo any stress or strain. In her eyes, cows were equal to God.

During the season of the south-west monsoons, the Kerala backwaters would overflow the riverbanks and become one with the Arabian Sea causing flooding all along the coastal area. At Idamannel, the family cowshed would succumb to the rising floodwaters and during such times Damayanthi would herd the cows inside the house! The living room would become filled with cowdung and urine. All the family members would raise a protest and curse Damayanthi for her action. Except Sudhamani of course, who loved the cows even more than her mother because of the affectionate role they played in the life of Sri Krishna.

All seasons were equally inspiring for the little one; for her everything was the Divine Play. She was not at all worried about the scorching heat of summer, the heavy downpour of the monsoon season nor the chilling ocean breezes of winter. She could see nothing in Nature other than her Beloved. She had nothing to gain from this diverse world; her sole aim was to merge in the Lotus Feet of Sri Krishna. Even the sound of the raindrops falling would fill Sudhamani's heart with love and devotion. For her, all sounds closely resembled the sacred syllable 'Aum', especially the falling rain. She would sing the praises of her Lord in consonance with that sound. Happily she would watch the rain visualizing Krishna standing in each raindrop.

With each passing day, Sudhamani's spiritual practices intensified, her abstracted moods becoming more and more noticeable. Sometimes she would enter the bathroom for a shower but would be discovered there hours later oblivious to the surroundings. These states of Sudhamani were a mystery to the family who were convinced that she was suffering from some kind of mental aberration. The little one was a lonely traveller in her own world. How can we imagine the spiritual depth of this innocent girl whose heart knew no bounds when it came to loving her Lord Krishna? What force but God Himself was leading the little one deeper and deeper into the depths of Self-Realization?

Oftentimes, while collecting leaves to feed the goats, Sudhamani was accompanied by her small companions who would always follow her wherever she went. They loved her company. Sudhamani was their leader. Sitting on a branch of a tree in order to pluck the leaves, Sudhamani would become overwhelmed with the distinct feeling that she herself was Krishna and later told, “All the boys and girls standing below me seemed to be the Gopas and Gopis.”

After this, she had many divine visions. Krishna would come in the late night and appear before the little one. The Divine Flute Player would catch hold of her hands and dance with her. At other times. He would sport with her and make her laugh. In those blissful moments, she would dance like never before in divine ecstacy, the dance of Radha and Krishna. At such times, she would hear the melodious sound of Krishna's flute. At first, she thought that Krishna was playing His heavenly flute standing somewhere nearby, but when closely observed, she found that it was coming from within her’ Immediately she would burst into tears and collapse in front of Sri Krishna’s portrait. If she ever happened to sleep, within no time Krishna would appear and wake her. Sudhamani later told, “His complexion was a combination of dark blue and light red.” Sometimes she would see a cot spread with different kinds of fragrant flowers. Catching hold of the little one’s hands, Krishna would dance with her on it. He would take her up above the clouds and show her different worlds and other beautiful scenery. But Sudhamani thought, "What attraction do these things have if He is not there? He is the Essence; the external appearance of these worlds will go on changing!’ Her conviction on this matter held firm. Her inner flight unto her Beloved was a frequent occurence. The little one’s surrender became complete at this stage.

Sometimes Sudhamani saw Krishna walking along beside her. At other times when she herself became inwardly identified with Krishna, she would feel like tearing all the pictures of Gods and Goddesses, including that of Krishna, off the

wall. ‘These portraits are just paper and paint, they’ are not Krishna. I myself am Krishna.’’ The next moment there would be a change in her attitude, ‘No, I should not tear down these pictures, it was this portrait which helped me to attain Krishna. Everything is pervaded by Krishna, the Supreme Consciousness. Therefore, this portrait is also That!’

Beholding and realizing everything as Krishna marked the culmination of a long period of sacrifice and yearning. Sudhamani would be seen embracing and kissing trees, plants and even small children as, wherever the little one turned, she saw the enchanting form of Lord Krishna. There was not even an infinitesimal point where she could perceive His absence. Later, she said about this period,

“I used to look at Nature and see everything as Krishna. I could not even pluck a single flower because I found that was also Krishna. When the breeze touched my body, I felt that it was Krishna caressing me. I was afraid to walk because I thought ‘Oh, I am stepping on Krishna!’ Each and every particle of sand was Krishna for me. Now and then I strongly perceived myself to be Krishna. Gradually this became a natural state. I could no longer find any difference between myself and Krishna who dwelled in Vrindavan.”

Thus Sudhamani became established in the Ocean of Pure Existence and Bliss and attained perfect peace of mind. However, her identity with the Supreme still remained unknown to the family and villagers. Though externally she looked like the same ordinary village girl, internally she was one with the Lord Krishna, the natural state of abiding as the One Reality’.

* * * * *

CHAPTER FIVE

FOR THE GOOD OF THE WORLD

All the Deities of the Hindu Pantheon, who represent the infinite aspects of the One Supreme Being, exist within us as well. A Divine Incarnation can manifest any one of them for the good of the world by mere will. The Divine Mood of Krishna (Krishna Bhava) is the manifestation of the Purusha or Pure Consciousness aspect of the Absolute...

-Mata Amritanandamayi-

Vamsî vibhûshita karât navanîra dabhât
Pitâmbarât aruna bimba phalâ taroshtât
Purnêntu sundara mukhât aravinda nêtrât
Krishnât param kimapi tatva maham na jâne

I know no Reality other than Sri Krishna whose hands hold the flute, Who is beautiful like a fresh rain cloud, Who wears yellow robes, Whose lips are red like an aruna bimba fruit, Whose face is charming like the full moon and Whose eyes are elongated like lotus petals...

MADHUSUDANA SARASWATI

Advent of Krishna Bhava

Young Sudhamani, whose entire being had found eternal rest in the Supreme, now struggled to carry on with the household chores as before. She was then hard to discharge her duties without fail but as we shall see, this was not what the Divine had in store for her.

It was during a Wednesday evening in the month of September 1975 that certain events occurred which would later mark the beginning of a fresh chapter in the annals of India's spiritual history'. The little one had just finished collecting grass for the cows and was returning home accompanied by her younger brother Satheesh. She was carrying a big bundle of grass on her head and the time was nearing 5 o'clock in the afternoon. She was in her usual sublime mood and the melodious tune of a devotional song was heard on her lips. As the two

passed the entrance gate of the neighbouring house situated on the northern side of Idamannel, Sudhamani came to an abrupt halt. She had overheard the final verses of the Srimad Bhagavatam being read out in the courtyard of this house.[1] The reading had come to an end and the devotional singing was just beginning.

Sudhamani stood there captured by the moment and appeared to be intently listening to the singing. Suddenly her mood changed dramatically. The bundle of grass fell from her head as the little one ran to the spot and stood in the midst of the devotees who were gathered there. Overwhelmed with divine bliss, her inner identification with the Lord overflowed into her external being transforming her features and movements into that of Sri Krishna Himself?

The devotees, for the most part, believed that Sri Krishna had come there temporarily in the form of this village girl in order to bless them. Sudhamani asked one amongst the devotees to bring some water and sprinkled it on everyone as sacred water. News about Sudhamani's Divine Manifestation spread quickly and soon a big crowd had gathered. There were skeptics in the crowd who raised an objection to the little one's sudden Divine Mood saying, “If you are really Lord Krishna, then you should be able to show us some proof of it through a miracle. Otherwise, how is it possible for us to believe?” Straight away came the reply,

“An object which does not already exist cannot be brought into existence. All things are really only the projection of the mind. Having the Real Gem within you, why do you crave for an imitation? Even though the Pure Being is within you, ignorance is veiling It!”

1.Even- month this family would conduct the reading of this great epic which highlights the life and sportings of Lord Krishna. One Sri Narayanan from the next village would conduct the discourse each month.

Unable to grasp this sublime truth uttered by one established in that Pure Being, they pressed her again and again to show a miracle. Sudhamani replied,

"I am least interested to make somebody a believer by showing a miracle. It is not my intention to show miracles. My goal is to inspire people with the desire for Liberation through Realisation of their Eternal Self. Miracles are illusory. That is not the essential principle behind spirituality. Not only that, once a miracle is shown you will desire and demand to see it again and again. I am not here to create desire, but to remove it."

The skeptics insisted, "No, we won't demand again, show a miracle once, we won't insist again!" At last, conceding to their insistent demand, Sudhmani told, "In order to inculcate faith in you I will do it once, bur never again approach me with such desires. Those who doubt, let them come to this same place on the day of the next Srimad Bhagavatam discourse."

When the next Bhagavatam discourse was held, a huge crowd gathered inside and outside the house. The non-believers even climbed the trees and perched on the rooftops hoping to expose any fraud. Revealing her oneness with Krishna, Sudhamani called one of the doubting Toms to bring a pitcher of water. As before, this was sprinkled on the devotees as sacred water. Then Sudhamani asked the same man to dip his fingers in the remaining water. To everyone's amazement the water had become pure milk! This was then distrubuted among the crowd as a holy offering from God. Then Sudhamani called another skeptic and asked him to dip his fingers in the pitcher. The milk in the pot had turned into a sweet and fragrant pudding (panchamritam) made of milk, bananas, raw sugar, raisins, rock sugar. All present raised a cry, "O God! O God!" and believed themselves to indeed be in the Divine Presence of Lord Krishna. The panchamritam was distributed among more than a thousand people who had gathered, yet the pot remained full to the brim. Some people

who were sitting at a distance near a small banyan tree at the seaside also received the sweet pudding, but still the vessel's contents did not diminish. A few skeptics were not satisfied and they declared the whole incident a feat of mesmerism insisting that the panchamritam would vanish within a few seeonds. Much to their disappointment it did not vanish and the sweet scent remained on everyones' hands for several days. This event greatly increased the faith of the villagers and they all firmly believed in Sudhamani's divinity.

Referring to the advent of Krishna Bhava Sudhamani explained,

"In the early days I used to dance in bliss and move about alone, persisting in Krishna Bhava, but no one knew. One day I strongly felt the urge to get absorbed in that Supreme Being once and for all. Then I heard a voice from within, 'Thousands and thousands of people in the world are steeped in misery. I have a lot to be done by you who are one with Me.'"

It was after hearing this voice that Sudhamani manifested her inner identity with Lord Krishna to the villagers. Sudhamani further continued,

"I was able to know everything concerning everyone. I was fully conscious that I myself was Krishna, not only during that particular time of manifestation, but at all other times as well. I did not feel, 'I am great'. When I saw the people and knew their sufferings, I felt- immense pity' for them. I was conscious of devotees offering salutations to me and addressing me as 'Lord'. I could understand the grievances of the devotees even without being told."

From that time onwards, Sudhamani regularly revealed Krishna Bhava near a small banyan tree growing on the western side of Idamannel near the seashore path. Around the tree there were quite a few flowering plants as well. On the whole it looked like a bush. A few years earlier the villagers had

planned to construct a temple there. To inaugurate the temple site, some of the village youth had united and planted another banyan tree as well as lighting a sacred oil lamp.

Sugunanandan had encouraged the youths and actively participated in their efforts. His elderly mother Madhavi often times accompanied by Sudhamani would come each evening, light the oil lamp and sing a few devotional songs. A tiny hut thatched with woven coconut leaves had been built right in front of this banyan tree and a portrait of Lord Krishna and Mother Kali had been installed inside.[2]

Now several years later, this became the spot where Sudhamani would reveal her identity with Lord Krishna. As the piece of land was public property, it was a convenient location for the people to gather and participate in the auspicious Krishna Bhava. Lying horizontally on a slender branch of the banyan tree, Sudhamani would assume the posture of Anantasayana, that is Lord Vishnu reclining on the thousand-headed serpent Ananta. The little one's body would become as light as air at this time by self-will. This was a wonderful sight for the devotees.

This sacred spot became a veritable Vrindavan, the Abode of Sri Krishna and the atmosphere was saturated with devotional songs in praise of the Lord. Devotees began to Hock to this place not only for the auspicious darshan of Sri Krishna but also to get relief from their problems. The devotees' distress would mysteriously vanish after unburdening their troubles to Sudhamani during the Krishna Bhava.

In those days when someone prayed for a solution to their problems, Sudhamani as Krishna would instruct them to light a piece of camphor and place the burning camphor on her protruding tongue. She would then swallow it along with the fire! After the Bhava had ended, nobody could find a trace of a bum on her tongue. This practice also increased the faith of the people.

News about Krishna Bhava quickly spread and people from Kerala and different parts of India started flocking to

Parayakadavu. This marked the beginning of a pilgrimage to this holy place which has continued unabated to this day. Some people came seeking relief from disease, some sought relief from material difficulties, others came out of curiosity, and some came out of devotion. But one thing they all discovered was that after coming to Sudhamani, a solution was found for their problems.

One group of local skeptics began coming just to pass time hoping to expose the fraud which is how they perceived Sudhamani's Divine Mood. But the little one remained equipoised under all circumstances. She would later explain,

"During the Bhava, different kinds of people come to see me, some out of devotion, others for getting a solution to their worldly problems, and for relief from diseases. I discard none. Can I reject them? are they different from me? Are we not all beads strung on the one life-thread? According to each one's level of thinking they see me. Both those who love me and those who hate me are the same to me."

During the first two Krishna Bhavas, Sugunanandan had been out of town on business. When he came to hear of the mysterious transformation of his daughter, he suspected it to be some undiagnosed disease. However, he decided to see the Krishna Bhava for himself before making any final decision. Thus, he arranged a Bhagavatam reading at Idamannel and on that day Sudhamani revealed her oneness with Sri Krishna. Having seen the Divine Mood of his daughter who had been since birth full of surprises, Sugunanandan was wonderstruck and could not utter a word. From that time onwards Sugunanandan, being an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna, was found partaking in all the Bhava Darshans which had become a regular feature of this hallowed coastal fishing area.

At this point, the parents still believed that Sudhamani's Divine Moods were only possessions of Lord Krishna and her devotional practices were temporary' aberrations that would stop one day. They waited for that day to come so that they

could give her in marriage. They cannot be blamed for their misconception as they were not at all aware of Great Souls and their behaviour. Theirs was a simple view of God and His manifestations on earth were, in their mind, limited strictly to the Gods and Goddesses in the shrine rooms and temples. God was not to be found elsewhere, least of all in their eccentric daughter!

Having forgotten their previous experiences, the parents once again made arrangements for Sudhamani's marriage. But each time Sudhamani blatantly threatened any prospective groom who was unfortunate enough to arrive at Idamannel. Finally, Sudhamani angrily warned her parents, "If you succeed in giving me in marriage, I will kill him and then come back to Idamannel.'"

The parents, having bitterly failed to marry off Sudhamani, decided to seek the advice of a well-known astrologer[3] who lived in a distant place and had never heard of Idamannel, Sudhamani or her Divine Mood. The parents were full of hope that at last they would circumvent this stubborn obstacle. After consulting Sudhamani's horoscope, the astrologer turned to Sugunanandan and said in a solemn tone, "This girl is a Mahatma (Great Soul or Saint). If the marriage is not yet arranged, please do not make any more effort to do so. If the marriage has already taken place, then call her back immediately. Otherwise you will have to face a great calamity'; it will be the cause of great sorrow for you. " The dejected father returned home with a heavy heart and all future plans for Sudhamani's marriage were dropped.

When people understood that Sudhamani's manifestation of Krishna Bhava was genuine, more and more of them came to receive her blessings. At the same time, some people came hoping to take advantage of Sudhamani's divine benevolence to further their selfish motives and to make money. One night, some people approached Sudhamani thinking

3.In India, marriages are traditionally arranged by the parents after an astrologer consults the son or daughter's horoscope.

that the little one could be tempted by money. They offered her a large sum of money if she would show some miracles. Sudhamani laughed out loud and affectionately told them,

"I have nothing to gain by showing miracles. My goal is not to gain name and fame and material prosperity by exhibiting miracles. There is an immense and inexhaustible wealth of divinity within us. Discarding that, why should one chase after the perishable and trivial wealth of the world? Selfless service to God and ailing humanity is my life's goal. I am here not to cam anything, but to renounce everything for the happiness of others."

Day by day the number of devotees increased as the wonderful experiences of those who had come to Sudhamani in Krishna Bhava inspired others to also take refuge there. The seashore around the banyan tree came alive with devotional singing and the villagers, forgetting all their differences, would gather together to sing and receive her blessings.

On one such occasion, a huge crowd of devotees had gathered at the sacred banyan shrine during Krishna Bhava. Suddenly, dark,menacing storm clouds gathered overhead and there was a downpour. As there was no shelter available nearby, the devotees simply stood there waiting for the inevitable drenching. But to the amazement of all, no rain fell at that particular spot where the devotees were standing, although it fell in torrents all around them!

During this period, a poisonous cobra continuously disturbed the pedestrians, particularly at night. The people of the village often saw the cobra moving feely about and everyone became fearful to walk along the seashore at night. Some of the villagers approached Sudhamani during Krishna Bhava and prayed for a solution. Then one evening during the Divine Mood the dreaded serpent made an appearance. The crowd scattered and stood cowering at some distance. Sudhamani fearlessly caught hold of the cobra and touched its flicking tongue with her own! After doing so she released

it. Never again were the villagers troubled by the venomous snake and once more they moved freely about the oceanside.

During one period the 'Children of the Mother Sea', as the fisherfolk were known, were starving because they had been unable to catch any fish for many days. They approached Sudhamani during Krishna Bhava and confided their tale of woe. Giving them a tulasi leaf,[4] she instructed them to have a young boy drop it into the sea at a particular spot and then to fish there. In order to test her, the fishermen did not act upon her advice and approached her again during the next Darshan (audience). Before they could say a word, Sudhamani pointed out their mischief and once again offered them a tu- lasi leaf. Surprised and remorseful, they accepted the leaf and proceeded to the sea, but somehow they failed to drop it in the designated spot. Taking pity on them during the next Darshan, Sudhamani blissfully danced on the seashore and in that way bestowed her blessing. Much to the fishermen's happiness and satisfaction, the next day a vast school of fish swam right up to the shore. Never before in the history of the village had there been such a bountiful catch. On two other occasions Sudhamani did the same in response to the sincere prayer and request of the fisherfolk. But this self-centred and desire-prompted devotion of the villagers did not win much favour or encouragement from Sudhamani. Though Krishna Bhava was the external manifestation of Sudhamani's infinite spiritual power which she expressed through the form of Krishna, her parents and most of the villagers believed that she was being possessed temporarily by Lord Krishna during Bhava time. Her elder brother and parents also had the idea that she was suffering from schizophrenia or some other mental delusion. For her part Sudhamani was content to leave it at that. At this point, apparently it was enough that the people were getting devotion to God and relief from their worldly sufferings as a result of the Bhava

[4] Tulasi is a variety of basil which is considered to be holy and sacred to Sri Krishna.

Darshan. This divine drama was to unfold in its various stages according to the needs of the people and at the proper moment.

Conducting the Bhava Darshan near the seaside had its drawbacks although it was true that the devotees could gather there freely. While some came out of reverence and devotion, there was a persistent group that came to abuse and harass Sudhamani. Not only that, the fast increase in the number of devotees had given rise to small scale developments around the banyan tree. One self-motivated group among the villagers had even banded together and formed an administrative board which promptly took a decision to install a locked box for monetary offerings for themselves. This was the forewarning of the formation of a troublesome alliance.

These occurances made Sugunanandan very sad. One night he approached Sudhamani during the Krishna Bhava and expressed his concern, “It is painful to see You performing Bhava Darshan on this roadside. Moreover it is intolerable to hear the non-believers poking fun al You. Besides all this, the little one is my daughter and it is heart-breaking to see her surrounded by all sorts of people in a public place." Saying this, he burst into tears.

Sudhamani replied, “In that case, give Me another place to receive My devotees. If there is no other place, that cowshed will suffice." Sugunanandan readily agreed and arrangements were made to repair the cowshed. It was cemented and a half wall was made in the middle which divided it into two sections. One side remained a cowshed and the other side was prepared for conducting the Bhava Darshan. All four sides were covered with woven palm leaves.

Soon, the Bhava Darshan was shifted from the seaside banyan tree shrine to Idamannel where it continues to the present day. During the Krishna Bhava, Sudhamani would stand in the newly built shrine. While leaning on the half-wall, she would now and then reach over and put her hand on one of the cows which were standing on the other side.

One night during Krishna Bhava, Sudhamani called her father and told him,

"My devotees will come from far and wide. Many of the devotees will come and settle here permanently. You will have to face many obstacles, but do not be afraid. Endure everything. Do not take revenge against anyone. Do not be envious. Do not seek anything from anyone. Everything you need will come to you unasked. Part of what you receive should always be given in charity. In due course, this place will become a great spiritual centre. The little one will travel around the world many times. Though you may have to suffer a lot in the near future, God will always bless you and provide for your needs. Your kith and kin and even the villagers will hate you and abuse you but in due course of time they will become your friends. Thousands of My devotees will become like your own children. From this day onwards the little one is ever pure."

Once more, Sugunanandan was wonderstruck! His dark blue daughter who had suffered countless beatings at his own hands was going around the world?! Why, she had never been as far as Cape Comorin.Thousands of people were coming to Idamannel? Where on earth would they all stay? It was only a tiny house. And what was the meaning of saying that the little one would be ever pure?[6] Though these words left a deep impression in Sugunanandan's mind, for the time being he dismissed them as crazy utterances. Only after years had passed did he realize the absolute truth of what had been spoken to him that day.

Some of the local people found that their own interests had suffered due to the relocation of Krishna Bhava and loudly protested saying, "We don't want a God who follows her father's wishes!'' The devotees who used to sing at the banyan

4.Cape Comorin is the southern tip of India, 200 kilometres to the south of Parayakadavu.

5.After Krishna Bhava began, Sudhamani never had her monthly period.

tree shrine now split into two groups. One group declared their opposition in the form of non-cooperation and the other group came to Idamannel to sing bhajans (devotional songs) during the Bhava Darshan as before. Provoked by the loyal group of devotees, a group of villagers came to Idamannel with the sole intent to quarrel and fight. They proceeded to openly abuse the bhajan singers while they sang during the Bhava Darshan. This antagonistic group, consisting of both men and women, persisted until one day Sugunanandan became completely fed up. He and some of the other devotees chased them out of Idamannel, but this was only the beginning of the trouble.

The Rationalist Movement

Some among the truculent group were sons of the village landlords. They banded together and formed an organisation which they named 'The Committee to Remove Blind Beliefs' otherwise known as "The Rationalist Movement'. From thirteen coastal villages they managed to round up a thousand youths who began their campaign to put an end to Sudhamani's Divine Mood.

The villagers loved the virtuous and noble minded little one since her very childhood when she would greet the new day with her enchanting singing to Krishna. Furthermore, they had faith in her Divine Mood and unwavering devotion but Sugunanandan's unyielding nature served to increase any feeling of envy or enmity that they might have had. At the outset of Krishna Bhava, Sudhamani had warned her father during one Darshan not to quarrel or take revenge on anyone who opposed her. Without heeding this divine advice, Sugunanandan took certain steps against the committee. This only redoubled the enmity of the so-called rationalists.

They began by making slogans against Sudhamani. They then proceeded to publish notices filled with baseless and irrational criticism of the little one. This vindictive campaign did not end there; in fact, their effort to defame Sudhamani

and bring an end to Krishna Bhava had just begun. Their next step was to lodge a false petition with the police against Sudhamani stating that she was cheating people in the name of devotion? As a result of the petition, some police officers came to Idamannel to interrogate the little one. Sudhamani, courageous under all circumstances, told the officers, "Please arrest me if you like and take me to jail. Here, the family members and villagers are not allowing me to meditate. At least in jail I would get solitude so I could always meditate on God. If it is God's Will, let it be done." Having spoken these words, she stretched out her hands. The police officers were very much impressed to see her bold yet innocent way of facing the situation and addressing them. A few thought she must be crazy, but the others were charmed by her personality and felt sorry that such a Great Soul was being so rudely scandalized and persecuted for nothing. These officers paid their homage and left Idamannel. The following song was composed by Sudhamani during this time of the false petition and subsequent police inquiry:

Thou art compassionate to the devotees...
O Pure Consciousness!
Destroyer of all transgressions!
Are there only sinners in this world?

O Bhagavan! O Bhagavan![7]
Who is there to instruct in the righteous path?
The Essential Principles[8] are only found
Printed on the pages of books...

O Bhagavan! O Bhagavan!
What is seen is just
False costume and trumpery.
O Kanna, please protect and
Restore righteousness!

[7] **O Lord! O Lord!**
[8] **This refers to the eternal spiritual truths stated in the Vedic Scriptures.**

One evening at twilight while the devotional singing was going on, another police officer, who was not satisfied with the first investigation, came to Idamannel on the basis of some new complaint. To his surprise the atmosphere had a soothing effect on him and unable to find anything offensive or amiss, he also left the place without uttering a word.

The miscreants still continued their efforts to put an end to Sudhamani's Divine Mood. They now turned to much more aggressive and direct tactics to achieve their desired end. Their next plan was to go to Idamannel in small groups during the Bhava Darshan and catch hold of Sudhamani during the Divine Mood, thus dishonoring her and at the same time making a sham of the Darshan. After catching hold of the little one, they intended to rough her up. These hooligans were convinced that their straightforward plan would succeed as they prided themselves on their courage and strength. However, before the night was over they left Idamannel full of shame as, for some inexplicable reason, not one among them dared to approach Sudhamani during the Divine Mood.

Undeterred, they now hired a black magician infamous for his deadly sorcery. He himself came to Idamannel and offered Sudhamani some so-called 'sacred ash' in which he had invoked malevolent forces. This ash was prepared from the charred body of a cobra and was known to be so powerful that its evil effects would cause death to the particular person towards whom it had been directed. Even to receive such ash in one's hand was considered a bad omen which would bring about a great disaster. Fully aware of the supposed consequences, Sudhamani took the ash and rubbed it on her body right in front of the misguided man. She thought to herself, "If the body is to perish by this, let it be so. If it is God's Will, can anyone escape it?" The unscrupulous man waited a long time to witness the agonizing effects of his sorcery which he had inflicted on numerous other victims. Finally, he had to quit the place admitting utter defeat as nothing untoward had occurred even after hours and hours had passed.

Now the miscreants were really desperate to finish off Sudhamani and her Divine Mood and they launched their most treacherous plan of all. During the Krishna Bhava they entered the temple and offered Sudhamani a glass of deadly, poison-laced milk. Sudhamani impeccably played her role and graciously smiling, drank the whole glass of milk without hesitation. The murderous enemies anxiously waited to see Sudhamani collapse in convulsions inside the shrine and breathe her last. To their bitter dismay, after a few moments Sudhamani turned in their direction, vomited the poisonous milk right in front of them, and continued to receive the devotees as if nothing had happened. The rationalists fled from the place and temporarily gave up their campaign against the little one.

The other obstacle which Sudhamani continually faced was the attitude of her own family. Despite the incessant harassment which she received from her own kith and kin, Sudhamani's mind never wavered in its equanimity, tolerance and compassionate resolve to uplift suffering humanity whether friend or foe, family or foreigner.

The formation of the antagonistic organization and its evil intention to harm the innocent little one created great mental distress for Sugunanandan. During this period, it was Sudhamani’s habit to spend her nights outdoors meditating under the star-filled heavens. Since her childhood she had always held sacred the solitude and silence of the night when she could commune with the Divine and dance blissfully in a God-intoxicated mood without interference.

Sugunanandan’s fear for his daughter multiplied when he thought of her enemies who may sneak up to attack her while she sat alone. Therefore, one day he demanded, “Daughter, come and sleep in the house!” Sudhamani firmly reassured her father, “See, I have no house of my own. I prefer to sleep outside. God is omnipresent. He is everywhere, outside and inside. Then why should I worry? If somebody comes to harm me, God will protect me.”

As for Damayanthi, when the Krishna Bhava began she had faith in Krishna but her abusive attitude towards the little one once the Bhava had ended persisted as before. This was due to her false perception that Sudhamani was possessed by Krishna only during the time of the Bhava Darshan and otherwise she remained as ever her lowly servant and eccentric daughter. After the advent of Krishna Bhava, Damayanthi had no choice but to exempt Sudhamani from her household responsibilities as, at any moment, her mind may soar off into samadhi regardless of time or place. If she happened to be cooking or wading through the backwaters this total absorption would be a genuine hazard.

As previously described, Damayanthi was always very orthodox when it came to her daughters conduct. She prohibited Sudhamani from talking to any of the devotees after the Darshan had ended, particularly to young men. If she did so, Damayanthi would severely chastise and beat Sudhamani without hesitation. She still feared that Sudhamani's unusual behaviour would bring bad reputation and dishonour to the family name! Although Sudhamani was beyond all likes and dislikes, the parents mistook her to be an ordinary' girl with all human feelings, attractions, and weaknesses except during the Bhava Darshan. We can only wonder how it is possible that the people who were closest to her were least able to recognize her constant abidance in the Supreme.

The most intractable member of the family was Subhagan, Sudhamani's elder brother. He could not digest his sister's way of receiving the devotees and was completely intolerant of her ecstatic way of devotional singing and dancing. Sudhamani, who was beyond all duality, would receive men and women, children and the aged, in the same equal manner. This infuriated Subhagan who, besides being an atheist, held the belief that women were subservient to men and should remain silent and unseen. He considered his sister to be a schizophrenic and tried his utmost to create obstacles for her.

One day, he intentionally broke the oil lamp which the devotees kept lit in the temple during Krishna Bhava. The

devotees who arrived that night for the Darshan felt very dejected seeing the broken lamp as there was no other lamp to replace it. Seeing their unhappy faces, Sudhamani asked some of the devotees to fetch a few seashells. When they were brought she then asked them to place wicks in the shells and to light them without oil as none was available. Then the impossible happened. Not only did the wicks light but they burned throughout the night until the Krishna Bhava was over, even without a drop of oil! When asked how this could happen, Sudhamani simply said, “The lamps burnt like that because of the sankalpa[9] of the devotees.” On the next Bhava Darshan day, a devotee who was unaware of the broken oil lamp and the subsequent incident, made an offering of oil lamps for the shrine. Responding to the queries of the devotees he explained that he had had a dream in which he was instructed to bring them.

Some of the villagers who arrogantly ridiculed Sudhamani had to face great disasters in life. The following is one such incident.

One day Sudhamani was returning home after visiting a nearby house. By the side of the path stood a group of villagers. As she passed them, Sudhamani overheard one amongst them teasing her. A wealthy villager was telling another man in a loud voice, “See this girl, she is crazy. She is always singing, dancing and pretending to be Krishna. What nonsense! This is a case of emotional hysteria. If her father would just give her in marriage, this disease would be cured.” Hearing his critical remarks, his friends burst into laughter. He continued egotistically, “If her father needs a dowry, I am ready to give him credit for two thousand rupees to marry’ this girl off. I must tell him today!”

Sudhamani didn't utter a word. Reaching home, she ran to the family shrine room and locked herself inside. Sitting there, she began pouring her heart out to Krishna, “O Krishna, don't You hear what they are saying? They call me

[9] **A pure resolve.**

crazy! They know nothing of Your beauty and instead would bind me to their own self-centered way of life. O Krishna, Protector of those who seek Your refuge, have You too abandoned me? If that is so, then who will ever worship You seeing my desperate condition? Is this the reward for the tears I have shed thinking only of You? Is this love and devotion of mine merely the raving of a crazy' girl? All these days You are my only comfort. In the blue sky I see Your smiling face, in the waves I see Y'our dancing form. The morning doves' song is Your divine flute playing only! O Krishna, Krishna..." Thus praying she began sobbing and collapsed on the floor.

Meanwhile, the wealthy man who had teased Sudhamani was busy readying his fishing boats and nets, of which he was the proud owner, for the days fishing. Gathering his workers, they pushed off into the sea. That day they had an exceptionally good catch and everyone was rejoicing as they rowed back to shore.

On the way back, some among the workers who loved and worshipped Sudhamani remarked to the boat owner, "Anyhow, it was not a right action to tease the innocent little one the way you did today." The boat owner snccringly retorted, "And so what if I did? see what happened because I teased her; we got a bigger catch than on most days?"

The devotees were tongue tied and hung their heads. The boat was nearing the shore when suddenly the boat owner said, "Hey, why don't we go to Neendakara?[13] There we will get a good price for our catch. In Parayakadavu the prices are very low." That decided,they steered the boat to Neendakara. They had almost reached the destination when suddenly the sea started to become rough. Within no time, huge waves rose up and dashed either side of the wooden boat. The boat full of fish, nets and fishermen was tossed up and down by the gigantic waves. All efforts put forth by the boatmen to control the boat were of no avail. As the waves dumped water into the boat it began sinking. The next instant, as if grabbed

13.**A town in Kerala well known for its fish markets.**

by an enormous wave, the boat was dashed on the rocks and broke into pieces. The day's catch was lost, one of the rich man's best boats was destroyed and his fishing nets lay tom on the rocks. Only their lives had been spared. With great difficulty, the workers and the boat owner managed to swim to the shore.

A most unexpected disaster had befallen the arrogant boat owner. Now it was his turn to walk along the shore with his head hanging down. Broken-heartedly he collapsed in the sand unable to bear his great loss. The workers who were admirers of Sudhamani whispered to each other, "See the result of God's fury. He was just boasting about his good fortune after he teased the little one. Now look and see what has happened.'" Another worker who was a devotee remarked, "He left the shores of Parayakadavu after saying that the little one was suffering from hysteria and even boasted that he would give 2000 rupees to marry her off. Now let as see from where he will borrow that money!" Altogether including the boat, fishing nets and the day's catch he had lost 75,000 rupees. The workers took a bus home and the news flashed everywhere.

In those days, sometimes Sudhamani would suddenly become playful like a three year old child and would make mischief with the devotees who had come for Krishna Bhava. When the Darshan was over, she would silently sneak about like a thief and approach the sleeping devotees. Sometimes she would tic the end of one woman's san to the hair of another woman. Other times, Sudhamani would pour a handful of sand on the men devotees who used to sleep with wide open mouths. Harshan, Sudhamani's elder cousin, was lame. He had great respect and love for her. If he happened to be sleeping somewhere after Darshan finished, Sudhamani would search and find him. Catching hold of him by the legs, she would drag him all around. It was a big joke for him as well and all the devotees would burst into laughter seeing Sudhamani's childlike sports. Subhagan never liked such actions of his sister and would scold her for her unusual behaviour. How could he, who never even studied the first lessons of spiritual-

ity, understand the exalted state of Sudhamani? Regarding her strange behaviour, Sudhamani said,

"My mind is always shooting up to merge with the Absolute. I am always trying to bring it down; only then can I serve ailing humanity and mingle with the devotees. That is why I play such games...to keep the mind engaged in the world of the devotees, though without attachment."

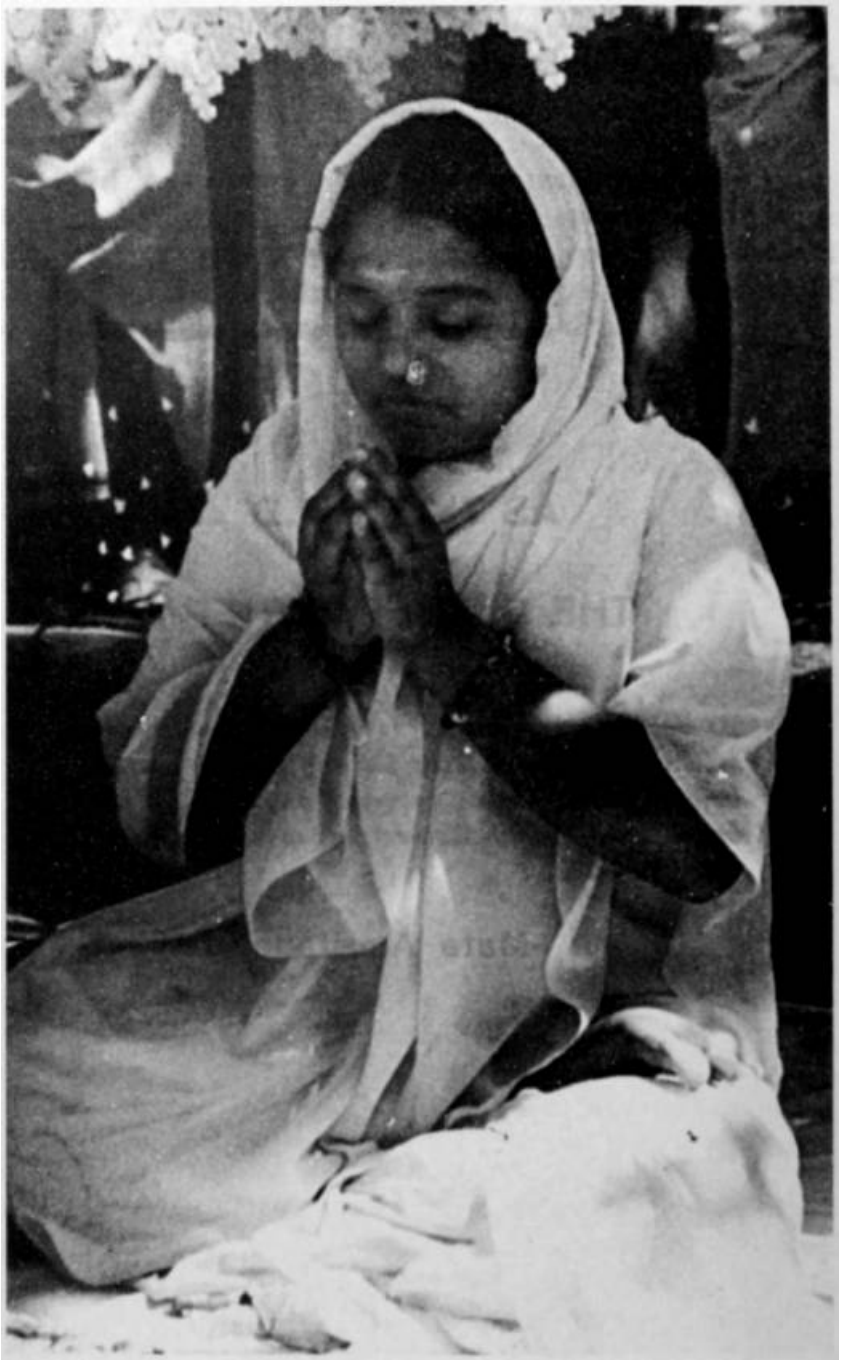
* * * * *

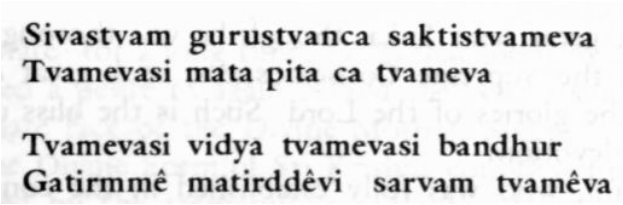
CHAPTER SIX

AS THE CHILD
OF
THE DIVINE MOTHER

As noble aspirations clearly manifested themselves in my mind, the Divine Mother, with bright, gentle hands, carressed my head. With bowed head, I told Mother that my life is dedicated to Her...

-Mata Amritanandamayi-




Sivastvam gurustvanca saktistvameva
Tvamevasi mata pita ca tvameva
Tvamevasi vidya tvamevasi bandhur
Gatirmmê matirddêvi sarvam tvamêva

O Devi, verily You are Siva, You alone are the Teacher,You alone are the Supreme Energy, You alone are the Mother, You alone are Father.

For me, knowledge, relatives, sustenance and Intelligence, everything is You.

DEVI BHUJANGAM

Devotion

Bhakti (devotion) and its unique charm is indescribable. A true devotee's sincere desire is to be a devotee forever. He wishes to attain neither heaven nor liberation. For him, devotion is his life and the Lord is his Supreme All-in-all. The devotee always finds delight in singing the glory of the Supreme. That is why the Bhakti Shastras[1] declare:

Devotion alone is the fruit of devotion.
In its intrinsic nature this divine love
Is Immortal Bliss...

1 Devotional scriptures like "Narada Bhakti Sutras'.

Even the great saint Suka, though he was thoroughly established in the Supreme Consciousness, took great delight in singing the glories of the Lord. Such is the bliss derived from pure devotion.

Sudhamani, who was fully established in the consciousness of Krishna, still had an unquenchable thirst to enjoy the bliss of Supreme Devotion--Para Bhakti. But her complete identification with Lord Krishna made it impossible for her either to meditate on His Form or get immersed in His thought. Then and there her prayers stopped flowing to Krishna and her Krishna sadhana came to an end.

One day, Sudhamani had a vision which brought about a vast change in her manifestation of the Supreme and her service to the world. This unexpected vision paved the way for Sudhamani's Devi sadhana, her passionate quest to realize the Supreme as the Mother of the Universe. Sudhamani was sitting alone in a room in the house. Her eyes were open but her mind was turned inwards and she was absorbed in the Self. All of a sudden, right in front of her there appeared a globe of brilliant light. It was reddish as the setting sun and at the same time soothing as the moon. The globe of light neither rested on the earth nor hung in the sky. It was rotating. Against the background of this radiant, yet cooling disc of light, emerged the most enchanting form of Devi, the Divine Mother with a beautiful crown adorning Her head. Excited by this heart-capturing vision of Devi, Sudhamani cried out, “O Krishna, Mother has come! Please take me to Her, I want to embrace Her!” At once, Sudhamani perceived Krishna lifting her. He ascended with Sudhamani up above the clouds where she beheld strange sights-lofty hills, huge thick forests, blue snakes and terrifying caves. But the little one could not find Devi anywhere. Like a small child, Sudhamani called out, “I want to see my Mother! Where is my Mother?” Saying thus, she began crying.

This exquisite vision of the Great Enchantress disappeared from her sight but became firmly fixed in Sudhamani's heart forever. The little one remained immersed in that enrap-

tured state for a long time. From that moment onwards she cherished a desire to again behold the benign smile and compassionate face of the Divine Mother. Sudhamani, who beheld the Divine Form of Sri Krishna countless times, was astonished by the tremendous radiance of Devi. Her heart rushed after Devi and her only desire now became to embrace the Mother, sit on the Mother's lap and give a kiss on the Mother's check.

Thus Sudhamani, who had never meditated on any other form than Sri Krishna, who had strongly believed that there was no Deity higher than Sri Krishna, now dedicated her entire being to realize the Supreme as the Universal Mother, Adi Parashakti.[2] Except for the time spent in Krishna Bhava, she would be found in deep contemplation of the resplendent form of the Divine Mother. The fire of longing for Her Vision burned in Sudhamani's heart day and night. Previously, the little one's household duties had demanded that she remain functional in the mundane world, but now this fetter had been broken and she became completely lost to this gross plane of existence. It became a struggle for her to even maintain the most minimal care of her body. For months together she subsisted only on tulasi leaves and water.

Sometimes when Sudhamani came out of deep meditation she would be heard crying aloud,

Amma! Amma! Where have You gone? Did You come that day only to abandon me? Please have mercy on this child of Yours and again reveal Your unsurpassingly gracious Form! O Mother, if I am deserving, make me one with You. I cannot bear this agony of separation? O Mother of the Universe, why are You indifferent to the heartbroken call of this child? Please embrace me, do take me on Your lap!

[2] The Primal Supreme Energy, the Creatrix, the feminine counterpart of the masculine 'Siva' or Pure Consciousness.

I shall wash Thy Feet with my tears.
O Katyayani, forsake me not.
How many days are wanted, my Mother,

To grant me the Vison of Thy Form?

Though Thou delayest in giving what I want,
My mind sits satisfied because of Thy Maya.
Will Thou allow me to offer
A red flower at Thy Feet?

Through this forlorn path
I wander in the hope of finding Thee.
Is there any kindness in Thy hard heart,
Tell me, O Beloved of Siva?

Just as Sudhamani had perceived everything to be pervaded by Krishna at the end of her Krishna sadhana, she now felt the Divine Presence of Devi in everything. Even the breeze was the breath of Devi. The innocent one used to roam about talking to plants, trees, birds and animals. She felt the earth to be her Mother and she would roll in the sand calling, "Amma, Amma! Where are You? Where are You not?"

One day after finishing her meditation, Sudhamani came out of the small shrine room. She was suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling that she was a small child and that Nature was the Divine Mother. In that mood she crawled like a baby on all fours and reached a coconut tree. The little one sat there shedding tears and pleading, "Mother...my Mother...why are You hiding from my sight? I know that You are hiding in this tree. You are in these plants. You are residing in these animals, these birds! The earth is nothing but You. O Mother, how You conceal Yourself in the ocean waves and in the cooling breeze! O Mother, my elusive Mother!..." The next moment she embraced the coconut tree feeling that it was the Divine Mother.

Sometimes Sudhamani would lie down, but not to rest or relax. She had developed a strong aversion for the material world and never liked to see it around her with all its attractive

objects and people who were totally immersed in sensuous pleasures. Thus, while lying down she would gaze at the infinite sky, the silvery clouds, the glittering stars, the shining sun or the soothing moon depending on the time of day. When dark storm clouds gathered overhead, Sudhamani no longer saw Sri Krishna there, but visualized the long, cascading, curly hair of the Divine Mother. Each object suspended in the infinitude of the heavens became a means for Sudhamani to remember Devi. As she lay there, she would never sleep. What may have appeared to be sleep to the onlooker was in fact an unconscious state which resulted from her continuous tear-filled supplications to the Supreme Mother of the Universe.

About those days Sudhamani later related,

"While walking I would repeat the Divine Name with each and every step. Always the next step was made only after chanting the mantra. If ever I forgot to chant the mantra while taking a step, immediately I would step backwards. Having withdrawn the step, I would repeat the mantra. Only then would I proceed. If I happened to be engaged in any external activity, I would decide beforehand to chant the mantra a certain number of times before finishing the work. While bathing in the river before plunging into the water, I would resolve to chant the mantra a set number of times before coming to the surface of the water. I never had a Guru, nor was I ever initiated by anyone and given a particular mantra. The mantra which I used to chant was 'Amma, Amma"

There is a scriptural injunction which states, "Actions will naturally subside in the supreme state of Devotion.." This can be clearly seen in the case of Sudhamani. In the morning, she used to brush her teeth, but the next moment her mind would become abstracted in the thought of the Divine Mother. This state would deepen and persist sometimes for hours together. Her attempts at taking bath usually met with even less success. First she would enter the bathroom and then realize

she had forgotten to bring a towel. After fetching the towel she would notice that she had also come without soap. Then she would think, 'O Mother, how much time is wasted just trying to take a bath! Instead, let my mind always be fixed on You! Even a moment not thinking of You creates agonizing pain in my heart..? Disregarding her original idea to take a bath, she would sit in the bathroom and merge in samadhi. Hours would pass before somebody who had been in search of her would discover her sitting in the bathroom deeply absorbed in meditation. In order to rouse her, they would pour a bucket of water over her head and in this way the little one finally got her bath! If this failed to bring her back, they would violently shake her. Sometimes they had no choice but to carry her to the house.

In this coastal area there were no proper toilets. Each family would erect a small scaffold over the backwaters and enclose the frame with woven palm leaves. As there was no flooring, one would perch on a board in order to go for one's nature calls. Many times it happened that while Sudhamani sat in such a latrine she would tumble into the backwaters having lost her external awareness.

Sudhamani would sit for long hours immersed in meditation on the Divine Mother. Before she would sit for meditation, she would make an inner resolve, "I must sit for this much of time? Then she would give a command to'the body, “Sit here, body. ” She would tell Devi, “Don’t play Your tricks on me. Keep them to Yourself. If You do not allow me to sit and meditate, then I won't let You go! ” If any external disturbance occurred, the little one would bite Devi and pull Her hair until she realized that she was biting her own body and ripping out her own hair.

One day, Sudhamani was unable to sit for the predetermined length of time as she felt someone violently shaking her body and this sensation disturbed her. Sudhamani thought, 'This is Her trick! Why is She not allowing me to sit?' Suddenly she opened her eyes, ran from the shrine room and returned a moment later with a wooden pestle thinking to

threaten and beat Devi. Raising the pestle, the little one shouted at Devi, “Today I will...” and the next moment she realized her own senselessness. She thought, ‘What! To beat Devi? Is it right? Is it possible?' She dropped the pestle and resumed her meditation.

Sudhamani would not waste even a second without remembering the Divine Mother. If somebody happened to talk to her, she would imagine them to be Devi. The person would go on talking until they realized that the little one had mysteriously slipped off to another world. If a moment happened to pass without remembering Devi, Sudhamani would be very distressed and confess, “O Mother, this much time was wasted.” To make up for the lost time, she would increase the length of her meditation that day. If she happened to miss a meditation then she would pace the ground the entire night repeating the mantra and sincerely praying, “O Mother, what is the use of this life if I am unable to meditate on You? Otherwise, there is only Maya waiting to devour me. O Mother, please give me strength! Grant me Your Vision! Dissolve me in Your eternally auspicious Self!”

Most of all, Sudhamani liked to meditate by the oceanside in the silent hours of the night. For her, the crashing waves resounded with the sacred syllable 'Aum'. The vast, deep blue heavens sparkling with countless stars reflected the limitless divinity of the Mother. Within a moment, the little one's mind would turn inward and spontaneously abide in the Self.

If Sugunanandan happened to search for his daughter on those nights he would become very agitated when he was unable to find her in the house or yard. Eventually, his search would take him to the sea. There he would find the little one absorbed in deep meditation sitting like an immovable rock. Some of the villagers, not knowing the purpose of Sudhamani's late night visits to the seaside, began spreading rumours about her. Eventually this reached the ears of Sugunanandan who thenceforth strictly forbade his daughter from going to the sea at night.

The above-mentioned incidents, which characterize the beginning phase of the little one's Devi sadhana, only served to more fully convince her family of her insanity. These high states of Pure Devotion were beyond the realm of an ordinary person's imagination. Sometimes Sudhamani would sob like a small child and call out to an imperceptible Being; at other times she would clap her hands and laugh aloud, then she would roll on the ground or try to kiss the ripples on the water calling out "Amma, Amma'. It is no wonder then that the little one's flight of the alone to the Alone was mistaken for madness. Even the devotees who visited her during Krishna Bhava utterly failed to comprehend this passionate quest of Sudhamani's for attaining oneness with the Divine Mother.

It is ironic that although her family considered her as one gone mad, they never tried to discover the cause or cure. Instead, they persisted in their habit of taunting and tormenting the little one, especially her elder brother Subhagan. Due to their inhumane treatment, Sudhamani at last resolved to put an end to her life by jumping into the ocean. She cried and called to the Divine Mother, ".Am I such a wicked girl? Why do the family members persist in their cruelty? People love only those who are charming. I cannot see pure love anywhere in this world. O darling Mother, I feel everything to be an illusion. O Mother, are You not the Protector of Your devotees? Am I not Your child? Have You also forsaken me? If so, then why should I carry this body? It is a burden for me as well as others. Accept Your child, O Mother Sea!" With a determined mind Sudhamani ran towards the ocean. Reaching there the little one was about to jump when she saw the vast sea to be Devi Herself. Unable to keep her mind on the physical plane, she entered into samadhi and fell unconscious on the sand.

Harshan, Sudhamani's cousin, was a well-wisher and devotee of the little one. He had overheard her parting prayer as she ran from Idamannel. He followed her in a haste having somehow understood her intention. Finding her unconscious on the oceanside he reverently carried her back to Idamannel thanking God that he had found her still alive.

The villagers would sympathize seeing Sudhamani's condition although many of them also considered her as mad. They would remark to one another, "See, what a pitiful condition it is. Poor girl! Nobody is there to look after her; even the parents have discarded her. When she was healthy and normal she toiled day and night for them, but now they are not at all interested to care for her. Is she not their daughter?"

Some of the women who lived in the neighbourhood took pity on the little one and began to lovingly serve her These women had deep admiration for this extraordinary fishergirl since her very childhood. They were now devotees of the Krishna Bhava and adored Sudhamani's spiritual splendour and all-embracing love at those times. Somehow, they had a vague understanding of her sublime spiritual states. Whenever they got a chance, they would extend assistance to the little one or rescue her from danger.

Chellamma and her daughter Vatsala lived on the plot of land directly in front of Idamannel. Vatsala considered Sudhamani as her close friend and had boundless love for the little one. Due to their close proximity to Idamannel, it was they who often times noticed the little one's unconscious tumbles into the backwaters. Immediately, they would fish her out of the water, dry her off and dress her in a fresh set of clothes. Pushpavathi was the wife of Bhaskaran and both were ardent devotees. She considered Sudhamani as her own daughter and felt sad to see how the family tormented her. Two sisters. Rema and Rati, were living beside Idamannel and held the little one very dear to their hearts. Aisha was Sudhamani's cousin on her aunt's side and had fond memories of the kind and affectionate Sudhamani. It was these ladies who were fortunate enough to serve Sudhamani during her days of intense tapas.[3] As the little one's family completely neglected her, these women tried to render their assistance whenever they could. Oftentimes when the little one became oblivious to the surroundings, one among these ladies would find her lying in muddy water or in a dirty place. If they could

[3] **Severe austerities.**

not revive her, they' would carry her in their arms to their own house. As if she was a small child, they would brush her teeth, give her a hot water bath, dress her in good clothes and feed her with their own hands.

As before, Subhagan remained at odds with Sudhamani and her Divine Mood. Several times he pressed her to stop the Krishna Bhava as he still considered it to be a shameful thing which would bring a bad reputation to the family name. Seeing that he was getting nowhere with his demands, he decided to take more drastic steps.

One day after the Bhava Darshan, Sudhamani was about to enter the house when she found her way obstructed by Subhagan who stood menacingly in the doorway. He shouted at her, “Do not enter this house! You will be permitted to come inside only after you stop this shameful singing and dancing!" Taking his words to be the Divine Command, Sudhamani walked out of the house without murmuring a word and sat in the front yard. Subhagan ordered her not to sit there either. Hearing this the little one took a handful of sand and gave it to Subhagan saying, "If it is yours, please count this sand!"

Thenceforth, she lived outdoors which was much to her liking. The sky overhead became her roof, the earth her bed, the moon her lamp and the sea breeze her fan. These austere conditions only served to intensify the little one’s renunciation and determination to realize the Divine Mother. Raising her hands above her head with tears rolling down her checks like a small child appealing to its mother, Sudhamani would ay out aloud, “Amma, Amma...have You left me here to die with longing for Your Vision? The days are passing one by one. Still I have no peace of mind without beholding Your enchanting Form. All my hopes are pinned on Y'ou. Will You also forsake me? Do You not see my desperate condition?" During this period, Sudhamani wrote the following songs:

O Devi, O Ambika, Beauty Personified,
O Thou Who art affectionate towards devotees,

May Thou dwell here in order to end
The sufferings of the devotees...
Thou art everything, powerful enough to
End my misery, the Tap Root of all...

Thou standest as the Empress of all beings,
Thou art everything and its Protector as well...

Believing this lam praising Thee with Devo-
tion. O Goddess of the Universe, I desire to See
Thee...

Since how many days have I been desiring to see
Thee...I am praising Thee without even losing a
Moment...

Did some mistake happen on my part or is it
That Thou hast no mind to end my sorrow?

Or perhaps Thou wishes t that my inner Self gets
Burnt to ash. I am getting confused; I know
Nothing...

Will the truth that I keep in my heart that all
The children are equal to the Mother become
False?

In order to end my misery I will request a
Little of the nectar of Thy Grace pouring
From the glance of Thy holy eyes...

I will fall at Thy Feet in order to see Thy Gracious
face and beg for the boon of the fulfillment of
Life... ♦♦♦♦♦

O Mother, for the satisfaction of my life
Give a drop of Thy Love to my dry, burning heart.
Why O why dost Thou put burning fire
As fertilizer to this scorched creeper?

Bursting out crying, how many
Hot tears have I offered before Thee?
Hear Thou not my heart throbbing
And agony coming out as suppressed sighs?

Let not the fire enter and dance
Through the forest of sandalwood trees.
Let not this fire of sorrow show its strength
And burst firth like shattering tiles...

O Devi, chanting the Name 'Durga, Durga'
My mind has forgotten all other paths.
O my Durga, I want neither heaven nor Liberation.
I want only pure devotion to Thee...

Due to her intense tapas, Sudhamani's body would become extremely hot as if she were standing in the midst of burning coals. It became so unbearable that she could hardly wear clothes. In order to get relief from the burning sensation, the little one would roll in the muddy sand of the backwaters. On certain occasions, she was seen standing submerged in the backwaters for hours together in deep meditation.

Sincere and ardent devotees of Sudhamani used to invite her to their homes during times of special worships. They believed that her presence would bestow spiritual splendour and power to the occasion. These families would come to Idamannel to take Sudhamani by bus to their house. Sometimes it would happen that while waiting at the bus station, Sudhamani would become God-intoxicated. Forgetting the external world, she would roll on the ground and burst into blissful peals of laughter. Of course, the people there could not comprehend the meaning of this state and would gather

around the little one and watch her in astonishment Others would tease and rebuke her calling her a crazy girl. Children used to stand around and pooh-pooh her, but such treatment was lost on Sudhamani. What taunting words could reach the world where she was revelling? What harassment could taint this innocent girl’s intoxicated mood of Divine Bliss?

In her deep anguish of separation from the Divine Mother sometime Sudhamani would cry and scream aloud. Small children would gather around her on such occasions and used to ask, "Elder sister, don't cry! Are you suffering from a headache?” Later, they also came to understand that she was crying to see Devi. During these uncontrollable outbursts, one among her younger sisters would stand before the little one assuming the pose of Devi wearing a sari and cascading hair. Sudhamani in great joy would run up to her and embrace her. If the little one happened to see a beautiful girl when she was in this mood, she would run to them. Embracing and kissing them, she saw only Devi.

Seeing his daughter's utter neglect of the body and taking pity on her, Sugunanandan tried several times to build a thatched shelter to protect her from the rain and sun. The little one would be lying or sitting somewhere merged in meditation. The parents would take this opportunity to construct a shade above her. Coming back to the state of normal awareness and seeing what her parents were doing she would move away from that place saying, “This also will become a cause for sorrow. For how many day’s will you be able to keep it here? If you go away somewhere who will maintain it? Unaffected by anything, let me endure heat, cold and rain and thereby transcend them.”

In those days of intense yearning for the Divine Mother, Sudhamani assumed the nature of a two year old child, the child of the Divine Mother. Her identification with this attitude of child to Mother was so complete that many of her actions can be understood only in the light of this fact. One day, coming out of meditation, Sudhamani felt very hungry and thirsty. Just then, she saw Pushpavathi of the neighbouring

house breastfeeding her baby. Straightaway Sudhamani went there, displaced the suckling baby and herself laid in the woman's lap for nourishment. Instead of feeling awkward by this unexpected act of Sudhamani's, Pushpavathi overflowed with motherly feelings for the little one. This incident repeated itself several times until Pushpavathi realized it was safer to feed her baby out of sight of the innocent-minded Sudhamani.

One day, Sudhamani was lying unconscious in the mud and sand near the backwaters. Some devotees happened to find her and felt heartbroken at seeing the little one lying there with her nostrils, eyes, cars and hair full of dirt and sand. The incessant stream of tears had left visible streaks on her dark blue checks. The devotees went and informed Sugunanandan about her pitiful condition but this plea fell on deaf ears. Greatly afflicted by the situation, they decided to carry the little one to the house as they were unable to arouse her. They cleaned the dirt from her body and unwittingly laid her on the cot belonging to her elder brother. They left her there so that she could rest comfortably.

Returning home, Subhagan found Sudhamani lying on his cot. He flew into a rage and began shaking the cot as if to break it into pieces. He became like a madman himself screaming, "Who put this wretch on my bed? Who put this wretch on my bed?" The bed broke into several pieces but Sudhamani lay there in the middle of the wreckage lost to the world. Later, when she came to know about the incident and her close brush with danger, she simply said, "Whatever happens is God's Will for the best." The very next Darshan, much to everyone's amazement, one devotee who was a carpenter and who was totally unaware of the previous day's incident, presented a cot, a table and chairs to Sudhamani. When he was asked about this, he told that he had a dream in which Krishna appeared and told him to bring all those things for the little one.

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Chapter Seven

FAR BETTER THAN MAN

"Human beings are not the only ones with the capacity for speech. Animals, birds and plants have this power but we do not have the capability to understand. One who has had the Vision of the Self knows all these things."

-Mata Amritanandamayi-

Ahimsâ pratishtâyâm tat
sannidhau vairatyâgaha

On being established in harmlessness, all beings coming near him cease to be hostile.

PATANJALI YOGA SUTRAS
SADHANA PADAM, VERSE 35

While Sudhamani was living outdoors, dogs, cats, cows, goats, snakes, squirrels, pigeons, parrots and eagles all sought her company and became her intimate friends. This phase of her sadhana exemplifies the power of love, untainted by attraction and aversion, to bring harmony among animals who were otherwise natural enemies. At a time when her own kith and kin had abandoned her and were staunchly opposed to her spiritual life, it was these animals who stood by her in rain or shine and rendered service. If one closely observed the behaviour of these animals, it would certainly seem that they understood Sudhamani far better than the so-called human beings.

In those day's, Sudhamani would not eat anything from her own house as she was extremely sensitive to food which had been prepared bv worldly people. The only food that she could eat was that which had been prepared while chanting mantras. One day, as she came out of the temple after meditation, she felt very hungry and thirsty'. Lying right in front of the temple was a cow from her house. The cow kept its rear legs in a convenient position so that one could suck milk from its udders. Taking this as an arrangement made by God, this is exactly what the little one did! Playing the role of a calf, she drank directly from its udders thereby quenching her thirst and hunger to her full satisfaction.

We cannot call this a mere coincidence as, from that day onwards, it became the daily habit of that particular cow to lay down in front of the temple until Sudhamani emerged from her meditation. Before feeding the little one, this cow would refuse to go to graze or feed its own calf! Annoyed, Sugunanandan and other family members tried several times to force the cow to move away from the spot where it would wait for the little one. They would pull the cow's tail and pour buckets of water on it, but try as they might, it would not budge an inch from in front of the temple.

On some days, milk would be brought from the neighbourhood for the little one to drink. However, it was not pure milk; it had been mixed with water. If Sudhamani ever drank this milk, she would vomit. It happened on these occasions that the people who had sent the adulterated milk for Sudhamani would also have to suffer. For that reason, Sudhamani decided that she would thenceforth only drink or eat what was provided by God.

The very next day, an extraordinary incident occurred which shows how mysteriously the Divine Plan works. The reader might remember the village Bhandaraturuttu where Sudhamani's grandmother lived some 6 kilometres south of Parayakadavu. In that village Sudhamani's uncle Ratnadasan as usual untied the cows from the cowshed to bring them to the front yard where he fed and bathed them. All of a sudden one of the cows wriggled away and began running towards the ocean where it took a sharp turn to the north. The cow was running at such a speed that Ratnadasan had to struggle to catch up with her. Finally the cow turned into Sudhamani's village, where it had never been, and ran directly to Idamannel.

Ratnadasan's amazement knew no bounds as he observed the subsequent events. The cow proceeded straightaway to where Sudhamani was sitting in meditation and began gently nuzzling and licking the little one as if to express its love to her old friend. As Sudhamani still remained deeply immersed, the cow laid down nearby intently watching the litrlc one as if

waiting for her to come out of meditation. After some time Sudhamani opened her eyes and noticing the vaguely familiar cow, got up and walked over to it. At that moment the cow raised one of its back legs inviting her to dnnk its milk. Sudhamani, for her part, drank from the udder to her full satisfaction. The little one's uncle standing a short distance away shook his head in disbelief.

What mysterious power had inspired the cow to visit this unknown place where Sudhamani stayed? Clearly, the cow had a purpose behind its wild ramble along the coast. Though Sudhamani had tended this cow during her brief stay at her grandmother's house many years ago, does this explain the logic behind this animal's unprecedented behaviour? Here our intellect must bow down to the wisdom of the heart.

When Sudhamani sat outdoors in meditation on various occasions, snakes were observed coiling around her body as if to bing her awareness back to the external world. Some readers may feel this to be mere coincidence but the following incident is more difficult to dismiss as happenstance.

One day, due to harrassment from her family, Sudhamani left the grounds of Idamannel. One lady from the neighborhood met up with her, consoled her, and led the little one to the peace of her own house. Reaching there, Sudhamani entered the family shrine room and began pouring her heart out to the Divine Mother. It was then that she composed the following song:

Through my mind, speech and actions I am
Remembering Yon incessantly.
Why then are You delaying to show
Your mercy to me, beloved Mother?

Years have passed but still my mind has no peace.
O darling Mother, please grant me a little relief...

My mind sways like a boat caught in a storm.
O Mother, give me a little peace of mind
Lest I become a lunatic...

I am tired Mother; it is unbearable.
I don't want such a lift. I can't stand

Your tests. O Mother, I can't endure it!

I am a miserable destitute.
I have none but You Mother.
Please stop Your tests,
Extend Your hand and pull me up...

Suddenly, her mood changed and she fell into a fit of divine madness. Crying and rolling on the ground, she began tearing at her clothes. The next moment she would burst into laughter still rolling uncontrollably. The family watched in concerned amazement and had no idea of how to calm the little one. At this juncture, a large snake appeared in the doorway and crawled directly onto Sudhamani's body. The family members stared horrified as the snake began licking the unconscious girl's face with its flicking tongue. This went on for some minutes and immediately had a soothing effect on Sudhamani. After a few moments, the little one's mind came down to the normal plane of consciousness. The snake crawled off her body and disappeared. It seemed to the onlookers that the snake knew the remedy to restore Sudhamani's external awareness and deftly administered to her needs.

Any visitor to Idamannel will soon notice that birds of all types are an ever present feature of the natural surrounding. Sudhamani especially loved the parrots as they were dear to the Goddess. Sometimes when she would pray, "O Mother, won't You come near me?" a flock of parrots would fly to her and settle on the ground nearby. One day a devotee presented her with a parrot which would always be seen playing around Sudhamani. The little one would never cage it. One day Sudhamani was contemplating "Oh, what a terrible, cruel

world it is! Not even an iota of truth or righteousness is to be found anywhere. All are deceitful and the world has become filled with sinners. It seems there is nobody to show the correct path to humanity.' Thinking this, tears began rolling down her checks and she remained in this introspect!vc mood for a long time. At one point, Sudhamani took notice of her parrot which was standing right in front of her. She found that it was also shedding tears as if it were suffering from some pain. Her intense agony had moved the bird as well.

Besides this parrot, there were two pigeons who would be seen spending time near the little one. Whenever she sang songs to the Divine Mother, the three birds would stand before her and dance gleefully to the tune spreading their wings and hopping about.

In a big tree on the Idamannel property there was an eagle's nest.[1] Somehow, the nest was disturbed and fell to the ground. The nest was destroyed and the two fledglings which were in the nest lay on the ground dazed and vulnerable. Some mischievous children began throwing stones at the tiny birds and tried to kill them, but soon Sudhamani arrived on the scene and saved them. She gave them shelter and carefully nursed them. Within a few weeks they were strong enough to be able to fly. At this time, Sudhamani set them free. These two Garudas always came at the beginning of each Krishna Bhava and would sit on the top of the shrine for a long time. They were a great source of attraction for the devotees as the Garuda bird was the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. 'This mysterious connection which these two birds maintained with Sudhamani not only added visual splendour to the Darshan but also increased the devotees' faith in the little one's divine nature.

During the period of Devi sadhana, whenever Sudhamani became unconscious shedding copious tears to see the Divine Mother, these two birds would fly from the sky and sit near her as if to protect her. Some of the ladies from the neighborhood

[1] The bald eagle is called Garuda in India. Garuda is the vehicle of Lord Vishnu of whom Sri Krishna is an Incarnation.

would watch with wide open mouths as these two birds, gazing at Sudhamani's face, also began shedding tears seeing her agony.

One day soon after meditation, Sudhamani felt terribly hungry. One amongst the two Garudas immediately flew towards the ocean and returned a few minutes later with a fish in its beak. The eagle put the fish on Sudhamani's lap who cooly took it and ate it raw. Somehow, Damayanthi came to know of this and she used to wait for the Garuda to come and make its daily offering. As soon as the bird dropped the fish, Damayanthi would swoop in and grab the fish so that she could cook it for her daughter. During the sadhana period when Sudhamani was intent to realize Krishna, she stopped eating fish as even the smell would make her vomit. But now, as far as she was concerned, the fish brought by the Garuda was the food sent by God and so she would eat it. This daily practice of the Garuda continued for quite some time.

Another animal who closely moved with the little one was a cat. This cat would enter the temple during the Bhava Darshan and go around Sudhamani as if doing pradakshina.[2] It would then sit near her for a long time with its eyes dosed and seemed to the devotees to be doing meditation. One time, somebody tried to get rid of the cat by taking it across the river but the very' next day it returned and stayed by Sudhamani's side.

Faithfulness is a common characteristic of dogs but the conduct of one black and white dog went far beyond dogged loyalty' as can be seen by the following occurrences. If Sudhamani cried too much to Devi and fell unconscious in her prayers, the dog would rub against her and lick her face and limbs in order to revive her. If Sudhamani was going to quit the Idamannel property, the dog would hug at her skirt and bark in protest to prevent her departure. At other times he would bring a food packet in his mouth and lay it before her to eat. The dog wouldn't eat even a grain of rice from whatever he had brought as an offering. In the night time the dog would sleep near the little one and Sudhamani would use him as a pillow if she ever happened to lie down to gaze at the sky.

One night the little one was meditating while sitting on the banks of the backwaters. She was steeped in samadhi and there was a thick blanket of mosquitoes all over her body. Sugunanandan happened to come there at that moment and began calling her. No reply came. Then he began roughly shaking her body as was the family's usual custom. He found that she had become so light in weight that it seemed as if she was a twig. “The whole body seemed like a corpse. But it wasn’t the first time we found her in that condition, so I wasn’t worried,” Sugunanandan later explained when describing the incident. He sat by his daughter but the next moment the black and white dog appeared on the scene and began fiercely barking. Within a few minutes, Sudhamani opened her eyes and came back to her normal awareness. It seemed that the animals had a greater capacity to capture Sudhamani's attention regardless of which world she happened to be revelling in.

Sometimes owing to the intense love of the dog, Sudhamani would think that it was the Divine Mother Herself. The next moment, forgetting everything she would embrace and kiss the dog calling aloud, “My Mother, my Mother....’”

One day while meditating, Sudhamani felt extremely agitated. Immediately she got up and began walking towards the village in a haste. Meanwhile, the black and white dog had fallen into the hands of a dog catcher. It was howling and crying piteously, but it was not acting viciously in the least. Unable to escape from the dog catcher's sling, it was dragging its paws as its captor struggled to haul it away. Some of the village girls who were friends and admirers of Sudhamani, recognized the dog as her faithful companion and requested the dog catcher to free the dog saying that it was Sudhamani's pet. As the dog’s release was not forthcoming, they even promised a bribe if he would only let the dog go. At this moment, Sudhamani arrived. The dog looked pitifully at Sudhamani and began shedding tears! This was too much for the dog catcher. Looking at Sudhamani and the dog’s unquestionable love for her, he had no other choice but to set the dog free.

In this manner the dog was saved several times from the hands of dog catchers.

Another dog from the neighbourhood also had intense love for Sudhamani. One day during the dog's pregnancy, it came to the side of the temple and stood expectantly waiting. When Sudhamani came out of the shrine after meditation, she found the dog standing on the temple verandah. It did not step in, but placed its forelegs on the edge of the temple floor. It began howling in a peculiar way as if it were crying. Sudhamani embraced and kissed her asking, "What happened daughter, what happened?" As soon as Sudhamani did this, the dog stepped down from the temple verandah and laid in the sand not far from where Sudhamani stood. Within a few seconds, it breathed its last.

Whenever somebody prostrated before Sudhamani, the black and white dog would stretch its forelegs and bow its head down before the little one. When the little one danced in devotional ecstacy, the dog would jump around her as if partaking in the ecstatic dance. When the sacred conch was blown during the twilight worship each evening, the dog would howl in a peculiar way closely imitating the sound produced by the conch.

One day, Sudhamani had an intense feeling that her friend, the black and white dog, would die afflicted by rabies. The same happened after a couple of days yet he died without much suffering. When Sudhamani was asked if she was dejected to lose her steadfast companion, she told "I am not at all sad about his death. Even though he died, he will come to me. Therefore why should I am sad?" Later, she told that the dog's soul had reincarnated nearby Idamannel but would reveal no further details.

About a goat which had great love for her, Sudhamani said, "On account of a disease in its udders, the goat was struggling for life. It was about to die when I returned from some place. Seeing its agony, I sat. at a little distance and got lost in prayer and meditation. When I opened my eyes I beheld the poor animal approaching me crawling on its knees. Reaching me

and placing its head on my lap, it quietly breathed its last gazing at my face. Such indeed is pure love.'"

Some years later recollecting all these incidents she expressed the following:

"How blissful indeed were those days! Strangely enough, those animals could understand my feelings and act accordingly. If I cried, they also would join me in crying. If I sang, they would dance in front of me. When I lost my external consciousness they would crawl over my body. All the traits of various animals can be found in human beings. When one gets rid of all attachment and aversion and attains equal vision, then even hostile animals will become friendly in one's presence."

* * *

CHAPTER EIGHT

DAZZLING LIKE A MILLION SUNS

Smiling, She (Devi) became a Divine Effulgence and merged in me. My mind blossomed, bathed in the many-hued Light of Divinity, and the events of millions of years gone by rose up within me. Thenceforth, seeing nothing as apart from my own Self a single Unity, and merging in the Universal Mother, I renounced all sense of enjoyment.

-Mata Amritanandamayi-

Drishâ drâghîyasyâ dara dalita nîlotpala rucâ davîyamsam dînam snapaya kripayâ mâm api shive

Anenâyam dhanyo bhavati na ca te hânir iyatâvane vâ harmlye va sama kara nipâto himakaraha

O *Spouse of Siva! may Thou graciously bathe even me, who stands helpless at a far off distance, with Thy far-reaching glance, beautiful like the slightly blossomed blue lily. This mortal will derive the summum bonum of existence from such action. By such action, no loss is, after all, sustained by Thee. The snow-beamed Moon sheds the selfsame lustre on a farcst as well as on a mansion. .*

SAUNDARYA LAHARI
VERSE 57

Placing her absolute faith in the Divine Mother, Sudhamani, the fisherfolk girl, swam in the Ocean of Immortal Love. For her, the whole atmosphere above, below, right and left was surcharged with Her Divine Presence. The breeze was the loving caress of the Mother. The trees, creepers and flowers were all Devi and hence worthy of Sudhamani's undifferentiated worship. Gazing at the sky, seeing what we know not, the little one would be overcome with uncontrollable fits of tears and laughter which subsided only when she fell unconscious to the sand. The heartbroken prayers of this orphaned child to her vanished Mother echoed in the air of Idamannel day and night. It was at this level of Realisation, of seeing all of Nature as being the Divine Mother only, that she wrote the following song:

Creation and Creator art Thou,
Thou art Energy and Truth,
O Goddess, O Goddess, O Goddess!

Creator of the Cosmos art Thou,
And Thou art the beginning and end...

The Essence of the individual soul art Thou, and
Thou art the five elements as well...

Attended mostly by the now familiar clan of animals, Sudhamani was neither seen sleeping nor eating. She never made contact with other people unless they first approached her and even a basic task such as brushing the teeth was beyond the capability of her high-flying mind. It was noticed that if she did eat, it might be used and discarded tea leaves, cow dung, glass pieces or human excreta; she was unable to find any difference between delicious food and all of these. What words are there to describe that State which our mind and intellect are incapable of grasping?

No longer could the little one contain her agony and her prayers could be heard incessantly pouring forth to the Divine Mother,

Mother, my heart is being tom by this pain of separation' Why does Your heart not melt seeing this endless stream of tears? O Mother, many Great Souls have adored You and thereby attained Your Vision and became eternally one with You. O Darling Mother.' Please open the doors of Your compassionate heart for this humble servant of Yours! I am suffocating like one who is drowning. If You are not willing to come to me then please put an end to my life. Let that sword with which You behead the cruel and unrighteous fall on my head as well. At least, let me be blessed by the touch of Your sword! What sense is there in keeping this useless body which is a heavy burden for me?"

Sudhamani's anguish reached a pinnacle. Her prayers had been said. In her own words,

"Each and every pore of my body was wide-open with yearning, each atom of my body was vibrating with the sacred mantra, my entire being was rushing towards the Divine Mother in a torrential stream..."

In unspeakable agony she cried out,

"O Mother...here is Your child about to die drowning in unfathomable distress...this heart is breaking...these limbs are faltering...! am convulsing like a fish thrown on shore... O Mother...You have no kindness towards me...I have nothing left to offer You except the last breath of my life..."

Her voice became choked. Her breathing completely stopped. Sudhamani fell unconscious. The Will of the Mother designates the moment The Divine Enchantress of the Universe, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Omnipotent Being, the Ancient, Primal Creatrix, the Divine Mother, appeared before Sudhamani in a living form dazzling like a million suns. Sudhamani's heart overflowed in a tidal wave of unspeakable Love and Bliss. The Divine Mother benignly smiled and, becoming a Pure Effulgence, merged in Sudhamani.

What followed is best described in Sudhamani's own composition 'Ananda Veethi' or 'The Path of Bliss' wherein she has tried to make intelligible that mystical union which is beyond words.

Once upon a time, my soul was dancing
In delight through the Path of Bliss.
At that time, all the inner foes such as
Attraction and aversion ran away hiding
Themselves in the innermost recesses of my mind.

Forgetting myself I merged in a golden dream
Which arose within me. As noble aspirations
Clearly manifested themselves in my mind,
The Divine Mother, with bright, gentle hands,
Carressed my head. With bowed head, I told
Mother that my life is dedicated to Her.

Smiling, She became a Divine Effulgence
And merged in me. My mind blossomed.
Bathed in the many-hued Light of Divinity
And the events of miliums of years gone by
Rose up within me. Thenceforth,
Seeing nothing as apart from my own Self
A single Unity, and merging tn the Divine Mother,
I renounced all sense of enjoyment.

Mother told me to ask the people
To fulfill their human birth.
Therefore, I proclaim to the whole world
The sublime Truth that She uttered,
ᵘOh man, merge in your Self'

Thousands and thousands of yogis
Have taken birth in India and
Lived the principles visualized by the
Great Sages of the unknown past.
To remove the sorrow of humanity.
How many naked truths are there!

Today I tremble with bliss
Recollecting Mother's words,
“Oh my darling, come to Me
Leaving all other works.
You are always Mine."

O Pure Consciousness,
O Embodiment of Truth,

I will heed Your words.
O Mother, why are You late in coming?
Why did You'give this birth?
I know nothing, O Mother,
Please forgive my mistakes.

At this point Sudhamani developed a strong aversion towards everthing. She would dig big holes to hide herself in so as to escape from the diverse world and sensuous-minded people. She spent her days and nights enjoying the pcrrenial Bliss of God-Realisation and avoided all human company. If anyone had considered her mad before, they would stand firmly convinced of her insanity' now. Who among these fisherfolk could conceive of the plane of consciousness in which the little one was established? Though internally Sudhamani had crossed the threshold into the Absolute, externally she was the same crazy Sudhamani who was possessed three nights a week by Krishna as far as the family and villagers were concerned. The only recent change, if they had noticed any at all, was that instead of rolling in the sand, she was now digging big holes.

Advent of the Devi Bhava

One day Sudhamani heard a voice from within her say,

"My child, I dwell in the heart of all beings and have no fixed abode. Your birth is not for merely enjoying the unalloyed Bliss of the Self but for comforting suffering humanity. Henceforth, worship Me in the hearts of all beings and relieve them of the sufferings of worldly existence..."

It was after this inner call that Sudhamani started manifesting Devi Bhava, the Mood of the Divine Mother, in addition to the Krishna Bhava. At these times, she revealed her oneness with the Divine Mother though, for the devotees, in addition to Krishna, .she had now become possessed by Devi

as well. The following incident marks the advent of Devi Bhava.

Only six months had passed since the beginning of Krishna Bhava Darshan. It was now late in 1975. One night as the Krishna Bhava was going on and the devotees were entering the temple one by one, an unexpected incident changed the whole atmosphere.

As usual, a group of devotees were singing devotional songs outside the shrine room on the verandah. Sudhamani was manifesting her inner identification with that aspect of the Supreme as Sri Krishna and was receiving the devotee? joyfully. A pleasant and enchanting smile lit up His bright face and the devotees in great delight were enjoying the Divine Presence. At that moment, a devotee entered the small temple completely distraught. Apparently, he had been severely harassed by one of the antagonistic villagers. [1] Unable to bear the sharp remarks, he burst into tears and appealed to Krishna to find some remedy for the situation.

Without warning, the gracious smile on her face vanished. Sudhamani's entire facial expression changed and became fierce as if the final dissolution had come. Her eyes looked like two smouldering iron balls. Burning with anger, it seemed as if they were emitting shooting flames all around. Her fingers were holding Devi mudra.[2] All present both inside and outside the temple were shocked to hear a boisterous laughter issuing from her whole being, They had never heard such laughter in their lives. Seeing the sudden change in Sudhamani, those standing in the temple began trembling out of tear not knowing what to do. Some scholars who were present began loudly chanting peace mantras and devotional songs in praise of the Divine Mother while some others showed

1. Die miscreants were still in operation and would stand along the roadside where the devotees would pass and make cutting remarks. Not only the villagers were engaged in such base conduct but Sudhamani's own father and brother would indulge in such activity. They would even try to discourage the devotees from remaining until the end of the Darshan.

[2] A divine gesture associated with the Divine Mother.

Aarathi.[3] After much prayer and chanting of various mantras, she became calm and peaceful, but the Bhava had been transformed from that of Krishna to that of Devi.

Sudhamani later told, “Seeing the distress of that devotee, I felt like destroying all the unrighteous people who persist in ridiculing the devotees. Unknowingly, the Devi of fierce nature[4] manifested to grant refuge to the persecuted." Thenceforth, in addition to Krishna Bhava, the Holy Mother as we will henceforth address her, regularly gave Darshan to the devotees as Devi.

The Holy Mother was the embodiment of Universal Love. Those virtues which had been prevalent since her early childhood such as the urge to love, help and serve the people, fully unfolded. The Mother accepted the most worldly and the most spiritual, the illiterate and the well-educated, the richest and the poorest, the sick and the healthy with the same equal tenderness and compassion. Patiently listening to all their problems which they came to unburden, she would adapt to the nature and maturity of each one. According to each one's need, she would guide and comfort them in all their difficulties.

Soon after the beginning of Devi Bhava Darshan, there occurred certain changes in Mother. During her Devi sadhaana, she was generally aloof and uncommunicative. All her time was devoted to prayer and meditation on the form of the Divine Mother. If her parents or brother abused her physically or verbally, she would keep silent. Now she became more daring and even her facial expression changed. Her nature became fearless and unyielding when it came to dealing with her parents and brother over the issues of the Bhava Darshan and her association with the devotees in particular. She now began mingling more with the devotees and instructing them spiritually. This marked the beginning of the Mother’s spiritual mission.

[3] **The waving of burning camphor before the Deity.**

[4] **Kali Mata**

My Own Formless Self

"From that day onwards I could see nothing as different front my own Formless Self wherein the entire universe exists as a tiny bubble..."*

In this pithy utterance, the Holy Mother conveys a wealth of insight. Although established in the ultimate state of God-Realisation, the Mother performed additional sadhana to prove that all the different forms of Gods and Goddesses are facets of the same non-dual Reality. Having attained perfect control over the mind, she found that she could identify herself with any aspect of the Divine which she chose by her own will. Mother has narrated various experiences which she had while performing these sadhanas:

"At the end of (one) sadhana one day I felt that a large canine tooth was coming out from my mouth. Simultaneously, I heard a terrific humming sound. I perceived the form of Devi with large canine teeth, a long protruding tongue, thick black curly hair, reddish bulging eyes and dark blue in colour.[5] [6] I thought, "Quick! Escape! Devi is coming to kill me!' I was about to run away. Suddenly I realized that I myself am Devi. The humming sound also was being produced by me. The next moment I found that I was holding Devi's veena.[7] I had Her crown on my head and I was wearing the Mother's nose ring. After a couple of minutes I thought, "What is this? How have I become Devi? Maybe this is a trick played by the Divine Mother to obstruct my sadhana.' (So I thought) "Let me meditate on Siva and see what happens,' bur the moment I began meditating on Lord Siva's form, I became Him, matted hair, snakes on my neck and coiled on my upper arms. I

5 Referring io her experience of the Divine Mother.
6 A description of Kali Mata
7. A stringed instrument always seen held in the lap of Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowled ge.

thought, 'Maybe Siva is also testing me,' so I stopped meditating on His form.

Now I fixed my heart and soul on Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Immediately my being changed to that of Ganesha, an elephant's face with a long trunk, a pair of tusks with one half broken, and so on. Whichever form of God or Goddess I contemplated on, I became that. Then I heard a voice from within, 'You are not different from them. They have all merged in you long ago. Then why should you call all these Gods and Goddesses?"

Thenceforth, the Holy Mother's meditation on God with form naturally subsided. The all-pervasive sacred syllable 'OM' sprang forth from within the Holy Mother and her whole being was forever merged in That. Even then, to set an example, she would sit and meditate. When asked about this, the Holy Mother told, "During meditation. Mother will go near all the children, especially to those who are intensely thinking of Mother or to those who are suffering."

A similar incident occurs in the great epic, Srimad Bhagavatam. One day, when the renowned sage Narada visited Dwaraka, the Abode of Sri Krishna, he found the Lord sitting in deep meditation. Narada reverentially bowed to the Lord and asked, "O Lord, whom are You meditating on?" The Lord smilingly replied, "I am meditating upon my devotees."

It should be kept in mind that although the little one had become 'Mother' in the eyes of many, she remained Sudhamani as far as her family was concerned. Her natural abidance in the Supreme Self was far too subtle for her parents and elder brother to understand even if they had tried. They continued to doubt and misinterpret her behaviour as schizophrenia. They feared that her contact with the devotees would result in her deviating from the path of morality and thus bring disrepute to the family. Her brother Subhagan was especially fanatical in his aggression against the Mother, and his behaviour towards her had gone from bad to worse as shown by the following incident.

One day, Subhagan and a few of his cousins called the Mother to a relative's house under some false pretext. When she arrived they locked her in a room of the house. One of her cousins began threatening her and suddenly pulled out a long knife which he had hidden in his clothing. Subhagan spoke, "This behaviour of yours has gone too far. You are bound to spoil the family name. Since you cannot stop mixing freely with all sorts of people and persist in your singing and dancing, it is better that you die." He was enraged to hear the Mother laugh and retort, "I am not at all afraid of death. The body must meet its end sooner or later, but it is impossible for you to kill the Self. Now that you are determined to put an end to my physical existence, I will express a last wish of mine. It is obligatory' that you fulfill it. Let me meditate for a while and then you are free to kill me while I am in meditation."

Hearing her daring answer, they became more infuriated. One among them exclaimed, "Who are you to command us? are we here to kill you or not kill you according to your wish?" Mother smiled and boldly retorted, "It seems that nobody but God alone can put an end to my life!" Another of the cousins shouted, "God! Who is your God!" Though they verbally threatened the Holy Mother, none among them was courageous enough to do anything against her after hearing her bold reply and seeing her unperturbed nature.

Suddenly the cousin who had brandished the knife jumped forward and pressed the knife against her chest as if to stab her. But he could not make another move as he was immediately afflicted by an excruciating pain in his own chest at the exact point where he had pressed the knife against the Holy Mother. He himself fell to the floor in agony. Seeing this, the others in the room were filled with dread. At this moment, Damayanthi, who had been fearful seeing Sudhamani leaving alone with Subhagan and his cousins, arrived on the scene. Entering the house, she heard the uproar and guessed that something very wrong was going on. She began pounding on the door and crying for them to open it. The door was unlocked and opened. Damayanthi took the Holy Mother by the hand and quickly left the house. '

On the way back to Idamannel, they walked along the seashore. The Mother told Damayanthi, “Your people are dishonoured by me. This ocean is my Mother as well. She will accept me happily with outstretched arms. I am going to Her lap.” Hearing her words, Damayanthi became mentally unbalanced. She began screaming, “Don't say that, daughter! Don’t say like that, daughter! During Krishna Bhava, Bhagavan told me that if you happen to commit suicide, all my children will go insane...” Somehow she succeeded in dissuading the Holy Mother and took her back to Idamannel.

This episode does not end here. The cousin who had raised the knife against the Mother to stab her was later hospitalized. Though he was provided with excellent medical treatment, he finally died continuously vomiting blood. When his disease was in its acute stages, the Holy Mother went to see him in the hospital. She lovingly consoled him and fed him with her own hands. He was deeply repentent towards the Holy Mother for his grave mistake and burst into tears having experienced the compassion and forgiveness of the Holy Mother for himself.

Here the readers should notice that the Holy Mother had no aversion towards her cousin who had attempted to murder her, nor had she made any resolve for the ill-fate that he met. He had suffered the fruit of his action. The Mother explained,

“Just as human beings have intense love for Mother, there ae numerous subtle beings who love her as well. If somebody attempts to harm Mother, Mother will not react. Mother will face it without any excitement and will not even think anything against him who acts out of ignorance. But these subtle beings will get angry and take revenge. Do you understand how this is? Suppose someone's mother is attacked by a man. Do the children sit back and not care about it? Even if their mother tries to stop them, they will find that man and take revenge.”

Transcending the limitations of worldly existence, the Holy Mother would receive the devotees without distinction of caste, creed, class or gender. In the eyes of the ignorant non-believers, the equal vision and broad-mindedness of the Holy Mother was just the manifest symptom of a mental aberration. The miscreants continued to enter the temple during the Bhava Darshan and unnecessarily question the Mother. Though the Mother remained unaffected and calm, Sugunanandan became very depressed due to their insolent remarks. Furthermore, although all his attempts to arrange the marriage of his daughter had ended in failure, he still could not completely let go of this idea. He now began to feel the Bhava Darshan was a great impediment to fulfill his wish. He joined Subhagan in his firm belief that the Darshan was a shameful thing. Something else also worried him. His daughter's body would become stone-hard after the Bhava and only hours of strong massage would return it to normal.

Such was the state of Sugunanandan's mind when he made a firm resolve with Subhagan to somehow put an end to the Bhava Darshan. With this thought in mind, Sugunanandan entered the temple during the next Devi Bhava. He told the Holy Mother, "Devi should go away from the little one's body. Here we don't need this Bhava Darshan anymore. We want to give her in marriage. I want my daughter back!"[8]

The Holy Mother addressed him as stepfather[9] and asked, "Is it your daughter?" Already agitated, he became more furious hearing himself addressed that way and angrily retorted, "Yes! She is my daughter. Do Gods and Goddesses have stepfathers? I want my daughter back!"

The Holy Mother calmly replied, "If I give back your daughter, she will be nothing but a corpse and will soon be decomposing. You will have to bury her, not marry her." Not

[8] It should be remembered that as far as her family was concerned, the Holy Mother was possessed three nights a week by Krishna and Devi and the rest of the time she was a crazy girl

[9] Since her young age she had accepted only God as her real Mother and Father and thus everybody else was her stepmother and stepfather

being in the mood to listen, Sugunanandan demanded, “Let the Goddess go back to Her own place! I want my child back!”

The Mother said, “If so, here is your daughter. Take her!” Instantly the Mother fell down on the spot. Within a few moments her body became stiff and her heartbeat stopped. Though her eyes were wide open, there was no sign of life to be seen. She was dead.

A hue and cry arose. All those who had come for the Darshan became dumb with grief. Damayanthi and her other daughters fainted on the ground. The news flashed that Devi had taken away Sudhamani’s life due to some error committed by Sugunanandan. Everyone accused him of being the cause for the untimely death of the Mother.

Oil lamps were lit all around the body. Even Nature had become silent in that moment. Some of the devotees burst into tears, others were blabbering like idiots due to sudden and uncontrollable emotional upset. Others sat solemnly near the body testing to see if there was any breath coming from the Mother by holding their hand near her nostrils. Nothing. A doctor who was present checked her pulse. Nothing. It was a terrible moment.

Coming to realize the horror of the situation caused by his indiscriminant action and unable to bear the excruciating pain in his heart, Sugunanandan also fell unconscious. A mournful silence reigned ail around. Thinking that the impossible had truly happened, all hope of her revival was given up. Eight long hours dragged by. Regaining his consciousness only to confront the dreadful scene, Sugunanandan cried aloud his prayer to the Divine Mother, Devi! I beg of You to please forgive me for speaking such words which I uttered out of extreme ignorance! Please bring my daughter back to life! Forgive my fault! Never again will I repeat such a despicable action!” Imploring thusly, he fell flat on the ground weeping uncontrollably in full prostration before the temple.

Minutes passed like hours. Suddenly one among the devotees noticed faint signs of movement in the Holy Mother's

body. With soaring hopes, the devotees stood by and their rears of sorrow were transformed into tears of joy. The Mother came back to life, but in Krishna Bhava! Addressing Sugunanandan, who was an ardent devotee of Krishna, she told him, “Without Shakti[10] there can be no Krishna!”

This incident brought about a great change in the father’s attitude towards God and his daughter. Thenceforth, he left her to do more or less as she liked and never again attempted to arrange a marriage for her. Later, the Mother remarked about this particular incident,

“He was adamant about getting his daughter back from Devi. But if this is really their daughter, then they should have the power to bring her back to life as well. That they could not do. At the most this body is theirs. When he demanded his child back, this body was given.”

* * * * *

[10] **The feminine aspect of the Cosmic Energy personified in the form of Devi**

CHAPTER NINE

THE SWORD OF TRUTH

Children, even when a man is cutting a tree down from its root, it gives him shade. A spiritual aspirant should also be like this. Only he who prays even for the welfare of those who torment him can become a spiritual person. A spiritual aspirant's greatest weapon is the sword of Truth.

-Mata Amritanandamayi-

Durvrtta vrtta samanam tava dêvi sîlam
Rûpam tadhaitadavi cintyamatulya
manyaih

Vîryam ca hantr hrtadêvaparâkramânâm
Vairisvapi prâkatitaiva dayâ tvayêdham

O Devi, Your nature is to subdue the conduct of the wicked; this Your peerless beauty is inconceivable for others; Your power destroys those who have robbed the devas of their prowess, and You have thus manifested Your compassion even towards the enemies.

DEVI MAHATMYAM
CHAPTER 4, VERSE 21

The Ill-Fated Subhagan

It seems that all Great Souls must endure the persecution of the mediocre minded. However, the Great Ones seem to thrive on this as even' obstacle thrown in their path adds additional brilliance to their glory. We need only look at the life of Sri Krishna, Sri Rama, Jesus Christ and Buddha to find ample evidence of this fact. The Holy Mother's life is also a shining example. Three years had now passed. It was the middle of the year 1978. The number of devotees continued to increase day by day as people flocked from all parts of India for the auspicious Darshan of the Holy Mother. As the number of admirers and well-wishers increased, the miscreants also stepped up their evil campaign. But no worldly power could obstruct the predestined spiritual mission of the Holy Mother.

At this time, certain bad omens were seen which presaged an impending catastrophe at Idamannel. Subhagan was not at all put off by the ill consequences of his attempt to have his sister murdered in cold blood. He now became more openly arrogant and hostile towards the Holy Mother. He tried to impose his own selfish ideas on the whole family. Even they were afraid to oppose him because of his volatile, hot-tempered nature. The increasing number of devotees and the unabated slander of the rationalists set his mind on fire with restlessness. He began accosting devotees coming for the Bhava Darshan and severely abusing them hoping to dissuade them from partaking in the Darshan.

At this juncture, either due to fate or as a result of his vile actions bearing fruit, Subhagan became afflicted with the terrible disease elephantiasis. Symptoms of this disease appeared on both his hands and legs. Although he underwent various medical treatments, none had a curative effect. The thought that he had become terminally ill plagued him constantly. He became severely depressed and developed suicidal tendencies. Several times he expressed his mental anguish to his close friends. He developed insomnia as a result and resorted to taking sleeping pills. The cumulative effect of his physical and emotional afflictions took its toll and gradually Subhagan lost his mental balance.

One day the Holy Mother called Damayanthi and told her, “It seems that brother Subhagan is nearing the end of his life span. As a solution you can take a vow of silence, but certain obstacles can be seen which will try to break your vow. Thereforc, be careful when you take the vow.” Adhering to the Mother's words, Damayanthi observed a vow of silence one day. However, when it was halfway over, it so happened that a cow broke its rope and started running from their cowshed. Damayanthi completely forgot her vow and shouted, “There goes the cow! Catch it!” The family took this as a bad omen, especially as Damayanthi had been forwarned by the Mother to attend her vow with care. This inauspicious occurance filled the family with fear and anxiety.

One day Subhagan, in a fit of fury, severely harassed a Muslim woman who had come to Idamannel for the Bhava Darshan. Unable to bear Subhagan's vicious remarks, the lady rushed to the temple, burst into tears and began beating her head against the threshold of the shrine room. She was crying out, Mother...O Mother...is this the fate of those who come to see You?"

Hearing the Muslim woman's distraught cries, the Mother's radiant and smiling face underwent an immediate transformation. With a terrifying appearance, she stood up from the sacred seat holding a trident in one hand and a sword in the other. In a solemn and deep tone the Mother said, "Whoever has caused this undue grief to this devotee will die after seven days."

When the Mother's prediction reached the ears of Sugunanandan, he rushed to the temple seeking forgiveness for his son's grievous behaviour. He pleaded to the Mother to spare Subhagan's life and take his instead. Mother calmly told, "I never punish anybody. If I am abused or harassed I don't care at all. But when a devotee suffers such abuse even God will not forgive. Each one must enjoy the fruit of one's actions. There is no other way."

Seven days had passed. It was nearly midnight on June 2, 1978 when Subhagan, who had been informed of the Mother's prediction, committed suicide by hanging. He had written a suicide note giving the reason as unbearable stress caused by his incurable disease. Subhagan's suicide created chaos and distress at Idamannel house. The miscreants immediately seized this opportunity to strengthen their anti-propaganda campaign against the Holy Mother. They began spreading fabricated versions of Subhagan's death. They accused Sugunanandan, who loved his eldest son like his own life, of murdering Subhagan.

For all their effort, the miscreants were unable to gain any ground with their unrighteous accusation as there was ample evidence that the death was a suicide. Besides the suicide note in his own handwriting, Subhagan had also sent letters to

some of his friends and relatives informing them of his intention. The post-mortem report also verified the death as suicide. Thus, the question of legal action did not arise.

Subhagan's suicide caused a stir among the relatives. They openly expressed their hatred and non-cooperation by completely ignoring the whole family as if it never existed. The family was no longer invited to attend or participate in public functions, festivals, marriage ceremonies or religious rites and rituals. All the relatives abandoned them. The relatives would come to visit the house next door but would not even look in the direction of Idamannel. If the relatives came to the seashore near Idamannel to perform rites for the ancestors, they would quit the place immediately after they had made the offering. This treatment was very hard on the family and only added additional weight to their already heavy hearts.

Sixteen days after Subhagan's death when the Bhava Darshan was resumed, Sugunanandan approached the Holy Mother with a heavy heart. He complained that the Mother had nor saved his dear son from a horrible death aixi burst into tears. Consoling him, the Mother said, "Do not worry. Your deceased son will again take birth as a devotee in this same house after three years." After a few years the eldest daughter, Kasturi was married. When she conceived her first child, the Holy Mother named the child 'Siva' while it was still in the womb. As the Mother had given a male name, the family was convinced that the child would be a boy. The child was in fact a boy. After his birth the Mother once told, "For the three years since Subhagan died, his soul has been around this Ashram atmosphere. Having heard the devotional singing and Vedic mantras, he was again given a birth as 'Siva' in this same house.'' Now Sivan is an intelligent young boy. Since his infancy he always chants the sacred syllable 'OM' and sits in meditation without being asked.

The Return Of The Rationalists

After the beginning of the Devi Bhava, the rationalists became more arrogant and antagonistic. They now began using the news media to try and mislead people into thinking that the Holy Mother was a lunatic and that the Bhava Darshan was a fraud. However, the greater their efforts were to defame the Mother, the greater too their failures. Their persistence was really a wonder!

One night, the miscreants decided to try again their old but unsuccessful tactic of catching hold of the Mother during the Darshan to humiliate her and thus make a mockery of Godly power. Two of the rowdier members of their group appeared on the scene, fully drunk and eager to create trouble in the shrine room. They joined the other devotees in the queue in order to enter.

Ar that time, the Mother was already seated for the Devi Bhava and told some of the devotees who were sitting near her in the shone, “Just watch. Mother will show you a good joke now.” With these words, she looked directly at the drunkards and cast an enchanting smile at them. By this time, they had reached the doorway of the shrine room but the one who was standing in front became unable to move as if he was paralyzed. He could not make another step and stood there frozen for a couple of minutes. His cohort who was immediately behind him became infuriated at this and asked in a harsh voice why he was not entering the temple. "Cant you see how many people are already standing inside the temple ahead of me!” he retorted. The other man shouted, “You are just standing like a log of wood since a long time! Have you also been hypnotised by this girl?” This sharp verbal exchange escalated into a fierce fight between the two rowdies while they left Idamannel as had already been forseen by the Holy Mother.

As previously mentioned, in those days some amongst the householder devotees used to invite the Holy Mother to their homes to conduct worship and devotional singing. Coming

to know that the Mother would be visiting a certain house, the miscreants would also gather there. One fine evening the Mother visited a house situated in the village Panmana which is about 20 kilometres from Parayakadavu. For a long time the family members of this house had been suffering various physical and mental ailments for which they had been unable to find a solution. They had conducted various pujas to invoke the help of different Gods and Goddesses but to no avail. Coming to hear of the Holy Mother, they had attended the Bhava Darshan and appealed to her for help. The compassionate Mother agreed to come to their house and perform a special puja to eliminate their ailments.

As it turned out, some of the family members were against the worship and joined up with the miscreants who were making preparations to disrupt the worship. On the evening of the Mother's visit one among the family members, full of arrogance, told the Holy Mother, “See, let me observe the worship. I will keenly watch everything. Then I have certain questions to ask." Then the Mother asked him, “Is this I ' something that is limited only to your body? Is it under your possession?"

It was now 2 o'clock in the morning and the Mother was preparing all the items for the puja. The person who had made the egotistic declaration fell back in an unconscious state as if in a deep sleep much to the relief of the devoted members of the family. Just as th last step of the puja was completed the arrogant fellow woke up with a start. He jumped up and exclaimed, “Oh, is the worship over? Oh, is it over...?"

The Mother replied, “Yes, it is finished. You said you would watch it keenly. Have you seen it? Now do you understand that the thing we call 'I’ is not under our control? When you were sleeping, where did your 'I' go? " The man turned pale and hung his head down without uttering a word.

The miscreants who had also gathered there were not to be put off so easily. They began questioning the Holy Mother in the most rude and irrational manner. The Mother remained

ever cheerful and unperturbed but the brahmacharin[1] who had come to assist in the puja became fed up. He requested the Mother, “Please show them something to keep their mouths shut. Otherwise the won’t cease their disturbance.”

A few more minutes had passed when suddenly there rose up from the nearby graveyard a tremendously blazing fire-ball. Rays of fire emerged from it as if dancing around the fiery orb. Now it was the Mother's turn to ask a question to the dumbfounded troublemakers. “Those who are courageous among you, why not walk to the graveyard and back?” Not one among them stepped forward to accept the challenge. After a moment, the frightened men-turned-boys stepped back and fled from the place.

Another similar incident occured in 1980 in the home of Srimati Indira of Karunagapally, a town some 10 kilometres from Vallickavu.- Indira was an ardent devotee and had invited the Holy Mother to visit her home to bestow sanctity there. As usual, the rationalists also arrived on the appointed evening. The family members became frightened seeing them as their ill-reputation was well known. They prayed to the Mother to disperse the band of non-believers.

The Mother became absorbed in meditation. Within a couple of seconds to everyone's surprise there appeared a brilliantly shining orb surrounded by many bright lights which looked like tiny lamps. This orb appeared at the northern side of the house and began moving in a southward direction passing through the front door. The devotees were filled with awe and reverence and uttered the Divine Mother’s Name. Slowly the orb flew higher and higher and finally disappeared into the distance but only after it had circumambulated the sacred bilva tree (aegle marmelos) growing in the southern yard. Astounded and frightened, the non-believers quit the house. They never returned to disturb the devotional

1 A spiritual aspirant who observes the vow of celibacy.

2 Vallickavu is the village on the mainland just opposite to Idamannel. The Holy Mother is sometimes called the ‘Vallickavu Amma’.

singing of the Mother and in fact, after this incident, many among them also became devotees.

Black Magic Fails

There was a very' egotistical sorcerer who lived nearby the previously mentioned house. Somebody had told him of a young girl in Parayakadavu who was possessed by Krishna and Devi three nights a week. The black magician boasted that he would bring a quick end to the possession. He even described the incantation that he would use. “I will split the midrib of a coconut leaf blade in two while uttering certain powerful mantras and the visit of the God and the Goddess in her body will immediately stop,” he declared. Thus he came to Idamannel one day. Try as he might, none of his trickery produced the boasted result and he had to leave after tasting a dose of his own ego. Still he persisted in his witchcraft against the Mother. On several occassions he sent her ash which had been imbued with evil mantras, but all of his attempts failed. Shortly thereafter he himself went crazy and became a beggcr in the streets. He would always be heard asking people, “Give me ten paise, give me ten paise..”

There was a priest who lived in Arickal, a village on the same island where the Holy Mother lived. Besides being a temple priest, he was a well known sorcerer who was particularly efficient in driving out evil spirits and subtle beings that had possessed innocent people. It seems that one elderly woman who had a strong disliking for the Holy Mother, secretly approached this priest. Her intention was to persuade him to use his powers to bring the downfall of the Holy Mother and the Divine Bhavas. In order to initiate the conjuration the woman wrote the Holy Mother's Name and birth star on a piece of paper and gave it to the priest.

That same day, one woman devotee of the Mother had a dream wherein the Holy Mother appeared and said that she should go to a particular temple the next day and offer her prayers there. The next day, the devotee came to the Holy

Mother and told her about the dream. The Mother told, “You go there and come back. Then you will understand the significance of the dream.”

Thus, having taken the permission of the Holy Mother, the woman proceeded to the temple which had been indicated in her dream. Unknown to the devotee, this was the same temple where the priest who had been persuaded to carry out black magic against the Mother conducted the daily worship. Having offered her prayers in the temple, the devotee went to meet the priest in order to discuss a few things. Seeing the devotee, the priest expressed his hospitality’ and got up from the cot on which he was sitting on. He began rolling up the mattress saying, “Come, please sit down...please be seated...” As he was rolling up the mattress, a small scrap of paper fell on the ground in front of the devotee. Picking it up, she saw the Holv Mother's name and birth star written on the scrap of paper. Immediately, she understood the import of the paper and the priest-sorcerer and the dream. She began beating her chest saying, “What have you done? Have you done something against our Mother? If so, then we will not live anymore!” Saying thus she burst into tears. The priest explained, “No, no, I have not done anything. One old lady came here yesterday continuously telling me that I should destroy that place. In order to get her to quit bothering me, I took this note from her and kept it here.”

Calming down on observing the priest’s sincerity, she requested him, “Please, you come and see for yourself what is happening there. Then you will understand the truth of the matter.” The priest agreed and said he would come there soon and observe the situation directly.

As promised, the priest arrived at Idamanncl during one Bhava Darshan. Hearing about the infamous priest’s arrival, a big crowd of believers and non-believers gathered and anxiously awaited to see the sorcerer’s meeting with the Mother. Some people said, “This priest is a great magician. He will put an end to everything that is going on here.” The devotees with stron conviction said, “He is not going to do anything ”

The priest had come with one elderly woman and he gave her a packet of beaten rice[3] to hold while he entered the temple. The priest had already decided that he would become a devotee of the Mother if she could prove to him that she was really a Divine Being. The Mother was in Krishna Bhava. She gave him a handful of sacred ash and asked, "Are you not here to chant this mantra? " Having said this, she uttered an obscure mantra which was known only to the priest. The priest was taken aback. The Mother continued, "are you not a worshipper of Hanuman? Do not chant evil mantras with the same tongue which you use to chant His Name. " The priest stood there speechless. Nobody in the whole world knew that his Upasana Murthi (Beloved Deity) was Hanuman. The Mother had just revealed the greatest secret in his life. But the Mother was not finished with him. "Have you not asked a lady to stand outside and hold a packet of beaten rice? Kuchela[4] went to Sri Krishna with an offering of beaten rice. Have you not come with the same offering of rice? But one thing. Kuchela offered the beaten rice of renunciation and Truth to Krishna. Even though the rice was full of stones and sand, the Lord couldn't see it. He looked and could only see Kuchela's pure devotion and open heart. There were neither stones nor sand there. Everything was ambrosia. That is why the Lord ate it. Why did you borrow raw rice from your neighbour? After husking the paddy, why did you mix it with stones and sand and bring it here? "

The priest was incredulous. Hearing all that he had done coming from the mouth of the Holy Mother in exacting detail, he burst into tears. With deep remorse, he sought forgiveness for his evil actions. From that day onwards, he became a true devotee of the Holy Mother.

[3] Grains of rice beaten into flakes resembling rolled oats.

[4] An ardent devotee of Lord Krishna whose story appears in the Srimad Bhagavatam.

Further Exploits Of The Committee To Stop Blind Beliefs

The Committee to Stop Blind Beliefs now launched more crooked plans against the Holy Mother. They tried to influence high police officials and government authorities to make a move against the Bhava Darshan. The Committee's activity led to several investigations, both public and undercover, but the only outcome to be seen was that many of the investigators became devotees!

One evening as the Devi Bhava was in progress, the troublemakers demanded that the girl who was singing devotional songs stop. The girl retorted, “I will sing. I have faith in the Holy Mother." A wordy duel started from this incident which culminated in a quarrel between the devotees and the rowdies. Finally, Sugunanandan arrived on the scene and chased them away.

Soon after they left, the Holy Mother called her father and warned him, "They have gone to lodge a petition against us. I will be the first defendent and you will be the second. You must go beforehand and inform the authorities of the true situation.” Without caring for the words of the Mother, he said, “They won’t lodge a case against us. The police won't come here.” The Mother insisted several more times and at last, Sugunanandan went to the police station. He found that the Holy Mother’s prediction was perfectly true and he presented his case clearly and sincerely.

We are not cheating anybody. It is true that my daughter is manifesting Divine Moods. Only if you come there yourself will you really understand the truth of the matter. The devotees come and sing devotional songs. There is nothing artificial there. Water taken from the public tap and ash purchased from Oachira are the substances distributed as prasadam.[5] We never materialize flowers from the sky. We offer flowers plucked from the trees and bushes. No advertisement or pub-

5 Consecrated offerings blessed by God.

licity is given about the Divine Moods. People come after hearing about the experiences of others who have already witnessed the Bhava Darshan. Above all, this takes place in my house. It is nobody else's property. The miscreants come to my house to fight and quarrel with me. Is this justice? Therefore, I request you to protect us from them?"

The officers could not utter a word after hearing what Sugunanandan said and seeing his emphatic sincerity. The false petition was cancelled. The miscreants were furious. In retaliation they launched their next plot to harm the Mother. In those days during the Bhava Darshan after the Holy Mother revealed her oneness with Devi, she would come out from the temple and dance in bliss. One evening, the miscreants came to Idamannel with a basket full of poisonous thorns. These thorns were so sharp and poisonous that even if one pierced a person's foot, they would fall down unconscious.

The thorns were entrusted to a group of local children who had been instructed to scatter them on the ground where the Mother always danced. This was to be done during the Deeparadhana[6] so that all the attention would be on the Holy Mother and not on the children spreading the thorns. This is exactly what the children did. When the Mother emerged from the temple she gave an intimation to the devotees about what had occurred and admonished them not to move from the place where they stood. With that, the Mother began her ecstatic dance while holding the sword and the trident in her uplifted hands. The dance of the Mother was an awe-inspiring sight. The devotees felt as if Mother Kali Herself, the Destroyer of evil, was dancing before them. She was dancing along the verandah at the front of the temple when suddenly her sword severed the strings which held the pictures on the wall. They came to the ground with a crash scattering broken glass all over the verandah. Unmindful of the hazard, the

[6] The waving of burning camphor before the Holv Mother seated in the temple as Devi

Mother continued dancing, all the while trampling the broken pieces of glass as if they were merely flower petals.

Those who had come to endanger the Holy Mother were wonderstruc at this sight but still waited full of hope to see her feet bleeding full of thorns and to witness the Mother collapsing on the ground unable to bear the excruciating pain.

Now the Mother stepped down from the temple verandah and came right to the place where the thorns had been scattered. She drew a line on the ground with the tip of her sword and forbade anyone to cross over it. With that, she stepped over the line and danced for a long time trampling the poisonous thorns. The miscreants could not believe their eyes. Now they became extremely nervous seeing this blood-stirring sight and immediately left the place.

When Sugunanandan realized what was happening, he began running here and there full of dread thinking of his daughter's wounded feet. He came with medicine to treat the wounds, but much to his astonishment he could not find even a trace of a scratch or a prick.

Although the so-called rationalists witnessed many such miracles with their own eyes, they were not ready to relinquish their envy and enmity towards the Mother. From the standpoint of the villagers and the devotees, the extraordinary happenings all around the Mother were a source of wonderment. But for the Mother, ever abiding in the Supreme Reality, these events were all child's play. When some of the devotees came to her full of depression due the endless stream of harassment imposed on their beloved Mother by the unrighteous miscreants, she told, "Children, there is no world without two. We should not be bothered by all these things. Mother's devotees are all around the world. They will not be deluded by all these actions."

The Holy Mother advised the devotees and family members to be calm and patient. They implicitly followed the Mother's advice and silently endured the dreadful conduct of the rationalists.

On another occasion, some of the younger members of the rationalist movement came to Idamanncl with a mischievous intention. They had decided to imitate the dance of the Holy Mother during the Bhava thinking that they could deceive the devotees and make a mockery of the Mother.

By the time they arrived, the Darshan had already begun. Thether was lovingly receiving the devotees one by one. At the same time, she called a few of the devotees and told them of the youths' intention to dance in imitation of her. She forbade the devotees from harming them and sent the devotees outside having given the necessary instructions. These devotees waited with alertness. After some time, one of the youths started to make a show. He tried to imitate certain gestures which the Holy Mother manifested during the Divine Mood. The vigilant devotees surrounded the trickster and began questioning him. Unable to answer their questions, he became frightened and understood the seriousness of what he had done. All his friends immediately fled the place leaving this boy behind. Running in confusion, he finally jumped into the backwaters! The devotees dragged him out of the water. They gave him a stern warning not to repeat his foolish actions and sent him on his way.

At this time, the miscreants launched their most bold and macabre plan of all. They hired an assasin to enter the temple and stab the Mother to death during the Bhava Darshan. Concealing a knife under his clothes, he entered the temple. Seeing him, the Mother beamed a benign smile at him and continued receiving the devotees. Her smile had a strangely soothing effect on him. Coming to his senses and realizing his grave mistake, he fell at the Mother's feet and begged her forgiveness. When he left the temple, he was a changed man. Noticing the startling change which had come over him, his villainous comrades asked him whether he too had been mesmerised by the Holy Mother. He merely smiled at them and thenceforth became an ardent devotee of the Mother.

During this period, it became impossible for the Holy Mother to walk along the road or village path without being

verbally abused by the uncouth troublemakers. They would stand on either side of the road and mock her in a very coarse manner. They even encouraged the young village children to do the same. If it was early morning, they would hide behind trees and bushes and even throw stones at her. This uncultured lot would not limit their torments to the Holy Mother. Ihe whole family fell a prey to their deplorable pastime. Seeing a family member, the miscreants would call out, “Here comes Krishna! Here comes Krishna!”

If the rationalists had no other plan for the evening, they would then enter the temple and make false claims to the Mother hoping to expose her as a fraud. One man came to the Mother and told her that he was blind. The Mother immediately shot out her forefinger as if to poke out his eye. The man jumped back and cried out, “Oh!” Thus, the Mother exposed the fraud of the one who came to defraud her.

On another occasion, a young man came to the Mother and said that he had severe pain in his arm. He expected the Mother to massage his arm believing his words. Instead, she asked a brahmacharin who was standing nearby to rub the man’s arm. As soon as the brahmacharin touched his arm, the man experienced severe pain in the exact place that he had described to the Mother. Unable to bear the racking pain, he sought her forgiveness for his childish prank. Without fail, those who came to defraud the Mother were themselves exposed as frauds.

“Today’s Enemy Is Tomorrow’s Friend”

Sugunanandan became fed up hearing and seeing this perpetual nonsense and evil action of the rationalists. Frustrated, one night during Devi Bhava he approached the Mother and said, “Is this the fruit which God has given me? People call me the murderer of my own son! I cannot walk through the village without constant reproach. This is a pitiful situation. Devi should punish the evildoers!”

The Mother replied, “Wait and see. Today’s enemy is tomorrow’s friend. Then who should I punish? Those who oppose you today will come and marry your daughters tomorrow. Console yourself thinking that everything happens according to God’s Will. If your one son is gone, thousands of sons will come tomorrow.” Damayanthi was steeped in sorrow over the death of her son. The Holy Mother told her, “Don’t be sad. In future, so many children will come here from all over the world. Love them as your own children.”

Though the Holy Mother's days and nights were dedicated to bestowing solace and succour upon the devotees, she still found time to serve and extend help to her family members who were facing a critical moment in life. From a worldly point of view, she was a young maiden, yet she did perfect justice to thousands of her devotees and to her own parents as well without even slightly deviating from the path of Truth and righteousness. Her attitude towards her family and the way she looked after them was a source of inspiration for the householder devotees. The Mother was a spotless example of how one could be spiritual and still fulfill one's duty to one's family while remaining detached and pure.

Though Sugunanandan had a fish marketing business, it was not very profitable. He finally closed it when the Bhava Darshan began bringing large numbers of people from all over the country to his house. Also, he could not concentrate on his business due to the opposition of the villagers and other problems which had cropped up in connection with the Bhava Darshan. He was forced to spend all his time at Idamannel. Besides all this, he still had three daughters yet to be married, though he seemed rather unconcerned. His sons were all in school. Now and then some one of the family would be afflicted with an illness requiring medical attention.

At this juncture, perhaps triggered by all this stress and strain, Sugunanandan was hospitalized in the beginning of 1979 and subsequently had to undergo surgery, The hospital was in Quilon, a city 35 kilometres south of Vallickavu. There was nobody to help in the household chores or to tend Sugun-

anandan in the hospital. All the relatives were dead against the family. Kasturi was working in a distant place. Damayanthi was bedridden with rheumatic pain. The boys were either too young or studying in school. All the burden fell on the Holy Mother's shoulders.

On Darshan days the devotees began arriving from 1 o'clock onwards. By four in the afternoon the Mother would sit for the devotional singing followed by the Bhava Darshan which would sometimes go on until 8 or 9 the next morning. Until everybody had been received, the Mother would not stir from her seat in the temple. In between all this, she would give instruction to the spiritual aspirants who came seeking her guidance. After the completion of the Darshan, the Mother would attend to all the household chores just as she had done for so many years. She would get all the younger ones ready and send them off to school. Once all the work had been accomplished, the Mother would go to Quilon bringing food and necessities to Sugunanandan in the hospital. She looked after him with utmost care and sincerely served him throughout his illness.

The miscreants were not ones to miss their chance. When the Mother walked through the village on her way to Quilcn, they would mock her and throw stones. They would call O , “Krishna, Krishna...” Silently enduring all their misguided behaviour, the Mother thought, 'At least in this way they are chanting the Lord's Name.’ Once, a rowdy even tried to seize the Holy Mother, but when he jumped forward to catch her, he slipped and fell into the roadside ditch.

Gradually, Sugunanandan regained his health. However, shortly thereafter Damayanthi was also hospitalized followed by Suresh. Throughout this period, it was the Mother who looked after all household duties and served the hospitalized family members.

Chaos and confusion prevailed in the family atmosphere but no matter what the situation, the Mother remained a solid pillar of support and sustenance, ever calm and compassionate. Imagine the situation. The uproar created by Subhagan’s

suicide, the non co-operation of the relatives, the antagonism of the rationalists, the flocking of thousands of devotees for the Bhava Darshan, and three unmarried daughters in the house. It is no wonder that nobody was eager to make a marriage alliance with this family! If somebody came with a marriage proposal from a distant place, by the time they reached Idamanncl, certain members of the village had met up with them to discourage them from their proposal. Several prospective grooms had beat a quick retreat.

And so it was that Sugunanandan again approached the Holy Mother and said, “Because of the Bhava Darshan, I have lost my honour. I cannot even show my face outside of Idamanncl. The villagers as well as the relatives hate me and my daughters remain unmarried. What am I to do?”

The Holy Mother replied, “It is not the Bhava Darshan which is the cause of all your misfortune. Everything moves according to Divine Will. All will take place at the proper time. You do not have to worry.” Sugunanandan was not to be consoled this time. He angrily shouted, “I will drink poison and die!” Hearing this, the Mother turned to a portrait of Devi and asked with tear-filled eyes, “O Compassionate Mother, am I bringing only sorrow to these people?”

Occasions were not rare when the Mother decided to leave Idamannel and even began making preparations to do so. But each time, this act was mysteriously blocked. Again Sugunanandan approached the Mother with his anxiety. Again she told, “Do not worry" The marriage of your daughters will take place without much delay.”

Within a month, the words of the Mother came true. A marriage proposal came for Sugunamma from the most unexpected family. This family was dead against the Holy Mother and the bridegroom was one of the ringleaders of the rationalist movement. Ironically, now that the marriage was fixed, Sugunanandan dropped out of the picture. The complete responsibility for arranging the actual wedding fell to the Holy Mother! Established as she was in a state of perfect equanimity, it seemed that there was nothing which could shake

the initiative and efficiency of the Mother. The marriage ceremony went off successfully despite the fact that Sugunanandan stood on the side lines casually observing the whole event.

The Holy Mother's words, “Today’s enemy is tomorrow’s friend,” came true and the same was repeated for the other daughters’ marriages as well.

There is a saying in Malayalam, ‘The jasmine which grows in the front of the house has no fragrance.’ The meaning of this is that if a person becomes great and famous, he will never be recognized by his or her own community. Many are the righteous souls who have suffered the truth of the adage. The Holy Mother would say, ‘‘Suppose somebody was listening to a beautiful song on the radio. He was really enjoying the sweetness of the song's melody when his close friend came into the room and said, ‘Do you know who is singing that song? It is our neighbour, Shankar.’ Immediately, the one who was enjoying the song turned off the radio saying, ‘Oh, what kind of a singer is he? It’s terrible!’ Children, this is the attitude of the people. It is difficult for them to accept a person who they have always known and moved closely with.” Thus it was in the case of the Holy Mother.

The circumstances that surrounded the Mother were far from kind. This young fisherfolk girl was supported by none. As the devotees were from different parts of the country, they could do nothing against the ignorant and uncultured villagers who tormented the Holy Mother. Besides that, the devotees for the most part believed that the Mother was possessed by Krishna and Devi during the Bhava Darshan. They failed to understand the depth or fullness of the Mother’s God-Realisation. Not only that; most of the devotees in those early days came primarily for worldly achievements, not spiritual upliftment. If their desire was fulfilled, they would return only when another desire cropped up. If their desire didn’t get fulfilled, then they would never come again and their devotion to the Mother ended there. The Mother had neither an inch of her own land nor a penny at her disposal. Her own kith

and kin were non co-operative and deadly opposed her. Her own family members were against her wish and will. They neither helped nor encouraged her in any way.

On one occasion, a devotee asked the Mother about the immensity of the trials and tribulations which she had to confront both during and after her sadhana days. They wondered how their own Realization could ever take place if they had to undergo so much suffering which they doubted they could forbear. Mother was quick to point out that her own life only showed that it was possible to realize God even under the worst possible circumstances.

It will be of great interest to the readers to know how the Holy Mother raised an Ashram from the midst of this raging storm and this will be related in the next chapter.

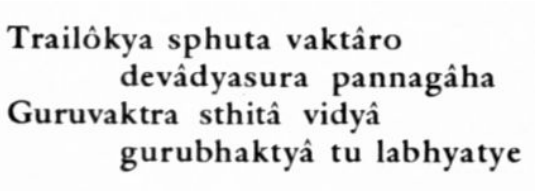
*** * * ***

CHAPTER TEN

THE MOTHER
OF
IMMORTAL BLISS

Always understand that Mother is omnipresent. Have the faith that Mother's Self and your Self are one. Children, the mother who gave birth to you may look after matters relating to this life; nowadays even this is very rare. But Mother's aim is to lead you in such a way that you can enjoy bliss in all your future lives.

-Mata Amritanandamayi-



The Guru's Wisdom cannot be learned
From even gods of the higher worlds;
The Guru's Knowledge awakes in him
Who serves his Guru with purest love.

GURU GITA
VERSE 22

A Band Of Youths

"Children, the coolness of the breeze, the beams of the moon, the vastness of space and all things of the world-these are all permeated with Divine Consciousness. Knowing and experiencing this Truth is the Goal of human birth. In this dark age a band of youths, renouncing all, will set out to disseminate spiritual light throughout the world."

-MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI

As early as 1976, a young boy of twenty named Unni Krishnan from the village of Alappad came to meet the Holy Mother. He was rather like a mendicant. Although he had a home and family, he only rarely visited there. After meeting the Holy Mother, he developed a strong thirst to lead a spin-

tual life. Understanding this, a year later, the Holy Mother entrusted him with the daily worship in the temple and allowed him to stay in her presence. He spent his daytimes inside the small shrine doing the daily worship and reciting the Sri Lalita Sahasranamam[1] which the Holy Mother had instructed him in. Following this, he would be engaged in other spiritual practices and the rest of his time was spent reading scriptural texts or writing devotional poetry'. In the night, he would sleep on the temple verandah and use only a thin towel spread on the floor as a mattress. He was so calm and quiet that none among the visitors would understand that he was staying there. Thus, he became the first resident of the future Ashram.

By the end of 1978, the nucleus for the Ashram grew when a group of well-educated young men, renouncing hearth and home, took refuge at the feet of the Holy Mother with the purpose of God-Realization and service of humanity as their one aim. Attracted by the magnetic personality and all-embracing love of the Holy Mother, these young men were inspired to lead the life divine against all odds. Most of them hailed from the town of Haripad[1] [2] and came from upper class families. After meeting the Holy Mother, it became their strong conviction that following the path shown by the Mother was the ultimate goal that they could aspire to in their lives.

Within the course of one month Sreekumar, Ramesh Rao, Venugopal, Harikumara Pai, Ramakrishnan, Balagopalan (Balu)[3] and Chandru[4] came to meet the Holy Mother and humbly requested her to guide them to their chosen goal. However, Sugunanandan still discouraged them from staying permanently near the Holy Mother. This was primarily

1 Sacred mantra consisting of the thousand Names of the Divine Mother.

2 Situated 20 kilometres nonh of Vallickavu.

3 Now known as Amritatma Chaitanya after receiving traditional brahmacharya diksha from the Holy Mother.

4 Now known as Adhyatma Chaitanya.

due to the fact that his other daughters remained unmarried. These young aspirants were either still in college or holding jobs, except for Balu who had just completed his college studies. They would come to see the Mother nearly every day or every other day while at the same time continuing to fulfill their responsibilities in the world.

For the most part, their sudden transformation from worldly youth to seekers of God created havoc among their family and friends. In their minds, the Holy Mother was a witch who had hypnotised their sons through the use of her master sorcery. Ever ready to find fault with the Holy Mother, the rationalists took up the cause. They began feeding the news media sensational stories in order to provoke public reaction against the Holy Mother.

The devotees and young men became worried about the appearance of these fabricated stories in the newspaper. When the Mother came to know of their anxiety, she burst into laughter and said, “We are not those letters and words printed on a piece of paper. Continue your spiritual practices without wasting your time paying attention to such things. Those who oppose today will become devotees tomorrow." As the days passed, this declaration of the Holy Mother became perfectly true.

In November of that year, Chandru, a brahmana lad from Alleppey[5] came to Idamannel to meet the Holy Mother. The first visit itself created a great transformation in him. He came to visit the Mother now and then whenever possible. He developed an intense desire to relinquish worldly life and sought the advice of the Holy Mother as to where he could stay in order to do his spiritual practices as, in those days, it was Sugunanandan's habit to chase away any young aspirant who desired to stay in the presence of the Holy Mother. Chandru also had to face Sugunanandan’s scoldings one evening and had been ordered to leave Idamannel. Greatly pained at heart, Chandru asked the Holy Mother to suggest a suitable

5 A coastal town 65 kilometres north of Vallickavu.

a cave on the sacred mountain Arunachala. The first two days he subsisted only on leaves and water. On the third day, in the evening, for lack of food he fainted calling aloud, 'Amma!' In a letter to the Mother he wrote, "It was about 5 o'clock in the afternoon when I fainted due to hunger. I was lying on the mountain in a semi-conscious state. Just then, I clearly heard Mother's voice calling, 'My son!' I felt that my forehead was being gently rubbed by someone. When I opened my eyes I saw Mother standing before me in her white clothes. I was extremely thrilled at the sight!"

After the Holy Mother received this letter, the devotees understood that it was exactly at that moment in Vallickavu when the Holy Mother had suddenly called out, "Oh my son!" and turned to a devotee sitting nearby saying, "Chandra in Tiruvannamalai has been starving since three days and now he is crying to see me!" After this incident, Chandru never had any difficulty to get food regularly.

In the absence of a proper place to do his spiritual practices, Chandru would spend his days on the mountain and his nights sleeping at the foot of the hill. Coming down from the mountain, the first person that he met was an Australian woman named Gayatri. After a couple of days he met Madhusudhana,[10] a native of Reunion Island, whose descendents had come from India. All three felt a stream of love binding them together. Recalling the words of the Holy Mother, Chandru had a strong feeling that both of them were her children. He began talking to them about the Holy Mother and showed them a small photo of her. Gayatri was enchanted by the blissful countenance and the glowing eyes of the Mother in the photo.

Although Gayatri would regularly try to meditate, she was not satisfied with her spiritual progress. After seeing the Holy Mother's photo and hearing about her selfless love and compassion, Gayatri had her first spiritual experience. To put it in her own words, "I saw a flash of light within me and dis-

10 Now known as Prcmatma Chaitanya.

cerned the living form of the Mother in that light. Suddenly from within me arose the cry, 'Amma! Amma! Amma!' Then all thoughts subsided and my mind sank into stillness. When I opened my eyes and looked at the clock, I realised that twenty minutes had passed. I had been unaware of anything. ”

Madhu, eager to share the happiness which he experienced while hearing about the Holy Mother, introduced Chandru to an American devotee named Nealu who was contemplative by nature. His spiritual teacher, who was a direct disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi, had passed away four years earlier. Serving his teacher, Nealu had been living in Tiruvannamalai for the past 11 years. At this time, he was mostly bedridden suffering from acute pain in the stomach and spine. He was hardly able to sit or walk even for a few moments. The doctors were at a loss to know the cause or cure.

Coming to know of Chandru's difficulty to find a place for meditation, Nealu offered his late teacher's cottage for Chandru's use. Chandru told him about the Holy Mother but Nealu was at first not very interested. He had already seen many great saints and was only concerned to cure his illness so that he could continue with his sadhana. With that idea in mind, he asked Chandru to take him to meet the Holy Mother after the completion of Chandru's vow of silence. Then Nealu gave the young sadhak a clock and rudrakshamala thinking that these items may be helpful in his spiritual practice. Recalling the Holy Mother's words that all would come unasked, Chandru felt overwhelmed with emotion and earnestly started his vow.

One day while circumambulating Arunachala, Chandru noticed a tall white man chanting Tamil verses while moving with a group of people around the hill. It was the day of Sri Ramana's birthday celebrations. When Chandru glanced at the man, he also looked at Chandru, though with an air of pride. Chandru thought, “Though proud, he too seems to be the son of the Holy Mother.” This man was, in fact, a devotee from France named Ganga[11] who later came to stay near the Holy Mother.

After forty one days of silence had been observed, Chandru and Nealu journeyed to Vallickavu. Nealu's first meeting with the Holy Mother was highly significant.[12] As he himself describes, "The first four days I spent there, I felt as if I was in Heaven itself, such was the bliss experienced in the Mother's Presence! One evening at the end of Devi Bhava, Mother was standing at the door of the temple and I was standing outside gazing at her with joined palms. I was overflowing with joy. At that moment, I saw her physical form disappear into an expanding radiance which spread all around and engulfed everything visible. That expansive light suddenly contracted into a blazing pinpoint of unbearably dazzling light and then I felt as if that light had entered into me. For three days I could get no sleep due to the spiritual intoxication of that experience. After this, I could think only of the Holy Mother day and night. I decided to be near her until the end of my life in order to take guidance from her and sene her."

Nealu returned to Tiruvannamalai with Chandru to settle his affairs and came back to Vallickavu accompanied by Gayatri who was keenly desirous of serving the Holy Mother. Strangely enough, Sugunanandan welcomed all of them as if they were his own children. For the first time in three years, Nealu felt some relief from his sickness and could move about doing small works.

When Nealu returned from Tiruvannamalai, he expressed his wish to the Holy Mother, "I do not want to go away from here. I want to stay with you forever as your humble servant." The Mother told him, "Son, I don't have an inch of land that is my own. Ask the father. Anyhow, we need a place to stay."

It was a great surprise to everyone when Sugunanandan agreed to donate a small piece of land on which was built a modest hut of woven coconut palm leaves. All told, it measured 9 by 18 feet. One comer was used as a kitchen for preparing drinks for the Holy Mother, but daily meals were still pre-

I Now known as Sarvatma Chaitanya.

II A detailed description can be found in Nealu's book, "On The Road To Freedom" by Neal Rosner, Cassandra Press, Boulder, Colorado, U.S.A.

pared in the main house. This hut served as shelter for the Holy Mother along with Nealu, Balu and Gayatri. This marked the informal beginning of the Ashram.

After his first meeting with the Holy Mother, Balu left his home and spent most of his rime with the Mother. It was his good fortune to get the permission of Sugunanandan to remain at Idamannel on a permanent basis. Thus, when Nealu came from Tiruvannamalai to stay permanently, Balu also settled there.

Having returned from Tiruvannamalai, Chandru was only able to stay with the Holy Mother for two months before she sent him to Sandheepany Sadhanalaya in Bombay to undergo a three year course in Vedanta.

After the arrival of Nealu and Gayatri, Ganga and Madhu also came and settled at the feet of the Holy Mother. Even though they offered their wealth to the Holy Mother with all devotion, she declined to accept it saying, “If you attain a pure character and become perfect spiritually, that will be my wealth. If one realizes the Essence within himself, he will see It in all. The whole world will become his own.”

One night, a man from a neighbouring house woke up Ganga in order to borrow his torch (flashlight). The man's daughter was suffering from an acute asthma attack and had to be rushed off to the hospital in the dark. After a few hours, the man came back and returned the torch. The next morning Ganga told Mother about the incident and added that he had felt like breaking the man’s head for disturbing his sleep. The Mother scolded him saying,

“What kind of spiritual aspirant ar you? What have you gained by leading a spiritual life for so many years before coming here? Is this the fruit of that? Being a follower of the Path of Knowledge as you seem to think you are, you should see everything as your own Self, if this is so, how could you be angry with that man? If your foot was pricked by a sharp

Ancient non-dualistic philosophy of life which expresses the essence of the Vedas.

thorn, would you not feel the pain and be restless to remove it? Imagine that man's anxiety to relieve his daughter of her suffering. The pain and suffering of all living beings should be felt to be your own. Only then will your mind expand and become as the sky which accomodates all equally. For that, your mind should become innocent like a child's and this is possible only through pure devotion to God."

Ganga replied in a mocking tone, "Devotion is not at all intellectually satisfying. To follow the Path of Devotion shows a certain weakness. Why all these emotional expressions like weeping and singing? I cannot do that. Sri Ramana never prescribed the Path of Devotion. He would only prescribe the Path of Knowledge to his devotees. I prefer the Path of Knowledge as it appeals to the intellect. It is more convincing." Such was Ganga's misconception of devotion at the time of his coming to the Mother.

xMother smilingly retorted,

"I have just seen the fruit of your practice of the Path of Knowledge. If this is the result, then you need not bother about leading a life of sacrifice and renunciation. You may as well enjoy all the pleasures of the senses! Did you read all the writings by and about Sri Ramana? If not, then please do so, for there are many works which are full of devotion. In fact, he himself was an embodiment of devotion to Lord Arunachala. Even the mere mention of that Name would bring tears of Divine Love to his eyes. Devotion is not an indication of mental weakness as you seem to think. It is the greatest achievement that a human can attain. It is perceiving God in all beings equally; it is pure love of Selfless Existence. Son, you should cultivate love within yourself."

Not convinced by the Holy Mother's words, Ganga went to Tiruvannamalai. Much to his surprise, he happened to come across a devotional work of Sri Ramana's. Recollecting the Mother's words, he was filled with an overwhelming feel-

ing of love and began weeping. He prayed to the Mother to call him back to her Holy Presence. It was at this time that the Mother, knowing his mental state, wrote a letter asking Ganga to return. Clearly realizing her greatness, he surrendered himself at her feet with all humility.

Madhu had met many saints before coming to the Holy Mother, but when he saw the Mother for the first time he felt as though he had come to the end of his journey. Dedicating his heart and soul to the Mother, Madhu began to collect all the extant commentaries on the Srimad Bhagavad Gita and to translate them into French for the spiritual benefit of French devotees. Inspired by the Holy Mother, he spread her spiritual mission in his native land of Reunion and built a beautiful Ashram there dedicated to her. With the blessings of the Holy Mother, he has been instrumental in bringing many people to the spiritual path.

In those days, the Holy Mother spent most of her nights outdoors. Therefore, everyone preferred to sleep beneath the coconut palms in the sand. Even if the Mother happened to take rest in the hut, by the middle of the night she would get up and walk outside to he down on the open ground. It remained a fact that the Holy Mother slept very little, ate very little and gave unstintingly of herself. Even after sitting in the temple receiving the devotees three times a week for the entire night, she always made time during the day to receive the devotees and to instruct the spiritual aspirants who sought her guidance.

In the beginning stages, Nealu and Gayatri had a lot of language problems. They always sought the help of Balu to converse with the Holy Mother, but before long, they slowly began picking up the Mother's language, Malayalam. During this period, Balu was very lucky to serve the Holy Mother as there was nobody else to look after her needs.

One day, Sugunanandan rudely remarked that he was unwilling to feed the ‘saippus' (foreigners). Thereafter, Gayatri began preparing food in the hut for the Holy Mother, Nealu,

Balu and herself. The Mother ate almost nothing. Sometimes at the insistence of Nealu or Balu she would eat a little, for name sake only.

One day, Nealu continued insisting that the Mother should eat some food. Finally, the Mother said, “Yes, I will eat. Bring something.” Without delay, Nealu brought a plateful of food for the Mother. Strangely enough, she finished everything in the twinkling of an eye. Nealu again served food to the Mother. That also was consumed in no time. The Mother looked expectantly at Nealu without moving from her seat. More food was served. This was also eaten. The Mother ate and ate but whatever was served seemed to leave her unsatisfied! Nealu and the others looked at each other in astonishment. More food was brought from the nearby teashop. That also was consumed by the Mother without delay. Nealu was exhausted! He turned pale. Never again did he insist that the Holy Mother eat!

During this period, family conflicts again cropped up. Only two months had passed since the marriage of Sugunamma when Sugunanandan hastily arranged the marriages of his other two daughters. Without anybody's consent, he fixed the marriage of his eldest daughter Kasturi. Even the Holy Mother was informed only after Sugunanandan's acceptance had been conveyed to the bridegroom's party.

The problem was, how to conduct the marriage without any money? Sugunanandan had no income and there was no money in the temple. As was his habit, Sugunanandan stepped out of the picture at this juncture. The Mother was unperturbed. Witnessing this, Balu became very sad and asked, “Mother, what is the plan? How to conduct the mar- riage?” Nealu told, “Mother, I will give whatever I have. It is the duty of the disciple to look after and discharge the respon- sibilities of his Guru. I have nothing to call my own; whatever I have is Mother's. Therefore, please perform Kasturi's mar- riage with the money which I have at my disposal.”

The Holy Mother replied, “After the marriage, the girls will lead a worldly life. What you have is the wealth meant for

spirituality. That must be spent only for righteous purposes. If it is given to worldly people, they will incur sin. That will affect us and our path as well. If it is God who made the father fix the marriage, let God conduct it. We do not have to pay attention to it. Sugunanandan is not much bothered by it; then why should we worry? Children, we do not have to be perplexed about the matter."

Though Sugunanandan was in a haste to fix the marriage, when it came to the more important details like the finances, one could find him standing on the sidelines. The Mother began organizing the needful without uttering a word. Seeing this, Balu became pained at heart and told the Mother, "I will bring my inheritance from my house." The Holy Mother was in complete disagreement. Then Balu wrote to some close devotees requesting financial assistance. Later, when the Mother came to know of this, she scolded him for this action saying, "Son, let us confront it calmly. There is nothing to be excited about."

At last, everything was ready except one item, five thousand rupees. This amount was absolutely necessary to meet the expenses of the wedding. After a few days passed, a cheque for Rs.5000 was received from an anonymous donor from Madras who had recently heard about the Holy Mother. Thus, in mid-September of 1980, Kasturi was married.

Not three months had passed when Sugunanandan fixed Sajani's marriage. That done, he repeated his disappearing act and left the difficult part to the Holy Mother. The responsibility for accumulating enough money to give as dowry, to pay the expense of the wedding ceremony and to craft the bride's gold ornaments all fell on the Holy Mother's shoulders.

Balu no longer felt sad, he felt angry! The Mother was also displeased by Sugunanandan's lack of discrimination. Though annoyed, the Mother remained unruffled and discharged the task with efficacy. The bridegroom's party asked for more gold. As usual, money remained a big question mark. The Holy Mother was very particular that not a penny be

spent from what had been put aside for righteous purposes. Nor would she allow any money to be borrowed. Then what to do?

At this juncture, Kasturi returned to Idamannel from her husband's place due to some difference of opinion. Coming to know of the need for more gold she told, "See, for the time being you can take my ornaments to conduct Sajani's marriage. It is enough if you return them later." Now, everything except one necklace and one ring was at hand. Two days before the marriage these items were yet to be had; still the Mother was calm and detached as ever. The next morning when the Bhava Darshan was over Gayatri, who was cleaning the temple, noticed a small package lying among the offerings. Opening it, what was her surprise to find a necklace and ring fitting the exact description of what was needed for the marriage! Even the style of the ornaments was the same as had been selected a month ago! What other proof was needed to show that the Divine Will arranges for everything?

However, this was not the end of the difficulties which plagued this final wedding. Some among the local devotees raised an objection with Sugunanandan. Why had he fixed a marriage alliance with those who had previously been enemies? Were the sons of the well-wishers and devotees not good enough for him? Some young men who had been close friends of Subhagan had wished to marry Sugunanandan's daughters. Now they also turned against him. Thus, when enemies became relatives those who were friends became enemies. They came to quarrel with Sugunanandan and conspired to create obstacles for Sajani's marriage. Hoping to annul the marriage, they spread scandalous stories and sent the same to the bridegroom. Even the day before the wedding everyone was full of doubt whether or not the marriage would be performed.

On the day of the marriage, the Holy Mother took the brahmacharis to the neighbouring house. For the two previous marriages she had done the same. This was for the benefit of the brahmacharis who should not attend such ceremonies.

The Mother explained,

"An aspirant should not take part in marriage ceremonies or funerals. At the former, everyone will be thinking of the marriage, which is a bondage. At the later, the grief is about the loss of a mortal being. In both cases, the participants are dwelling on the non-eternal. These thought waves will be harmful to a seeker. The worldly vibrations will enter the subconscious mind. The seeker will become restless for unreal things."

Thus, the main impediment for the brahmacharis to take up permanent residence in the Holy Mother's presence had been removed. All three of Sugunanandan's daughters were now married. Not only that. The miscreants and rationalists, accepting utter failure, retreated one by one. Some among them understood that their irrational actions were meaningless and left the organization forever. The remaining members began fighting among themselves and thus the 'Committee to Stop Blind Beliefs' was totally dissolved. Those who came to fight against Truth and Righteousness became the cause of their own destruction. These developments marked the beginning of a new phase in the Holy Mother's spiritual service to relieve and uplift ailing humanity.

Mother's attitude towards all the trials and tribulations which she suffered from her relatives and miscreants over the years is unique. One day she narrated,

"It was their misguided conceptions that made them speak and behave the way they did and also because they could not realise the significance and purport of spiritual life. Such being the case, why should we be angry with them or dislike them? It would be our ignorance to do so and as a result our minds would only get polluted. Look at these fresh roses. How beautiful they are ! What a fine fragrance they exude! But what do we give them to make them grow? Just a little used tea leaves and cow dung! What a vast difference between

these beautiful flowers and the manure given to them! Compared to their beauty and fragrance, is this manure befitting them? Likewise, impediments are the fertilizer which makes us grow stronger spiritually. These obstacles will all help our hearts to blossom fully. Chirping at night is the nature of crickets but that sound never disturbs anybody's sleep. Likewise, to create trouble is the nature of the ignorant. We must therefore pray to God to forgive them and to lead them to the right path. Dedicate everything to God and He will look after you."

The Mother of Immortal Bliss

It now became possible for the first group of brahmacharis to settle at the feet of the Holy Mother due to the relative peace of mind that Sugunanandan enjoyed since the marriage of his daughters. Despite the fact that there were no accomodations, due to the brahmacharis' keen interest to be in the company of the Holy Mother, they took no notice of the fact that food, clothing and shelter were minimal. Most of the time, they had to live outdoors and sleep on the bare ground without even a mat. Whatever was received came unasked and was shared amongst themselves. Having no money, if any of them had to go somewhere, they would walk. Even though they had only one set of clothes each, somehow they learned to manage.

Feeling a bit depressed one day that his only set of clothes was dirty and worn, one of the brahmacharis complained to the Mother about the lack of necessities. The Mother replied, "Son, do not ask for such small things from God. Surrender yourself at His Feet and He will give you whatever you really need. " The Holy Mother had lived that way herself and therefore spoke only from her own experience. The very next day a devotee brought a new set of clothes for all the brahmacharis although he had been unaware of the situation at the time.

These boys received an all-round training in renunciation due to the austere circumstances which they lived in during

the early days of the Ashram. In order to give them courage, the Holy Mother told them, “If you can withstand this here, you can be at home anywhere. If you can overcome any adverse situation now, then you will easily cope with any crisis or challenge of life.”

As the number of devotees and resident brahmacharis went on increasing and the lack of facilities stayed the same, the idea to formally incorporate as an Ashram was born. However, the situation did not look very promising. The Holy Mother had neither land nor wealth at her disposal. Even the land where Nealu had built the hut belonged to Sugunanandan. Although he had given permission for Nealu, Balu and Gayatri to stay at Idamannel permanently, Sugunanandan had never entertained the idea that his home would become a future Ashram. The thought of accomodating more and more people did not hold his fancy either. Once when the Holy Mother was discussing the idea of an Ashram, he angrily made his point very clear, “What is this! Do we have anv wealth or riches here? How to run an Ashram? Where shall we (the family) go if this becomes an Ashram? No! I shall not agree to register an Ashram here!”

Initially, the Holy Mother was not in favour of the idea to become a formal Ashram either. When some amongst the devotees approached her with the proposal, she replied, “Mother has heard a lot about ‘Ashram’. Mother does not need an Ashram. Is it not a bondage? Haven’t you seen the palmist walking with the caged parrot, i.e. being bound for another person’s purpose? At last. Mother’s situation will also become like that. I cannot do that. Mother has her own freedom. There should be no obstacle for that.”

However, as the flow of devotees and disciples swelled, it was not long before the need of an organised Ashram became an unavoidable necessity. Furthermore, the Holy Mother’s foreign disciples, according to the law of the land, were prohibited from staying in a private house for any appreciable length of time. At this point the Holy Mother herself became convinced of the need for a government approved spiritual

centre. The Mother's opinion was sought as to how to proceed. She mischievously replied, "Anyhow, the family members will not establish an Ashram. Their samskara[14] is different. Let us not wait for their permission; they will never co-operate. But we may have to hear a little of their scoldings!"

Thus, on the 6th of May in the year of 1981, with a view to preserving and propagating the ideals and teachings of the Holy Mother, the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission was founded and registered under the Travancore-Cochin State Literary and Charitable Act of 1955, at Quilon, Kerala, South India. From this time onwards, the Holy Mother officially adopted the name 'Mata Amritanandamayi' which was given to her by one of her brahmacharin sons. Already being the Mother of Immortal Bliss, as her name denotes, the name was indeed befitting.

Around this time, one of the brahmacharins, being in need of some scriptural books, requested Mother to select a number for him from a lottery in which the winner would be presented with some books. Mother told him, "Why crave for such things? You will soon receive plenty of books." It was shortly after this incident that Nealu, who came to stay permanently with Mother from Tiruvannamalai, decided to shift his library of more than 2000 books in English and various Indian languages from that place to the Ashram in Vallickavu. Thus, the Ashram Library came into being.

On August 27, 1982 a Vedanta Vidyalaya (School) was started in order to impart traditional Vedantic and Sanskrit knowledge to the residents of the Ashram. All the same. Mother always reminds the brahmacharins of the importance of meditation instead of mere book learning. The Ashram routine consists of six to eight hours of meditation for all the residents. Those who would like to devote all of their time for meditation are by all means encouraged and there are a few such in the Ashram. Mother says,

[4] Culture or mental tendency.

“Scriptures are just like signboards. They are only a means but not an end in themselves. The end is something beyond them. A student of agriculture knows how to sow the seeds, when and how to put the fertilizer, how to get nd of pests and prevent their return, etc. Likewise, study of scriptures gives us directions as to how to do our spintual practices.”

A word should be said about the vast change which has come over the Holy Mother's family and the villagers. Realising her to be divine, they now feel proud of the fact that they are related to her or living in the same village. Sugunanandan and Damayanthi often wonder what meritorious acts they performed in their past lives in order to become the "parents' of the Divine Mother Herself! They are now exemplary householders and lovingly play the role of a father and mother to all of the brahmacharins who stay in the Ashram, regarding them as their own children.

Today, Mata Amritanandamayi Mission is a growing spintual centre headed by the Divine Mother who is very particular to see that it is run according to the ancient traditions of this holy land of India. All the Ashram work is attended to by the residents themselves who each put in at least one hour of work each day for the maintenance of the Ashram, cooking, cleaning, tending the cows, etc. The Ashram is looked upon by Mother’s many devotees as their spiritual home and as a fertile field where noble spiritual qualities can be abundantly cultivated, and the fruit of God-Realisation reaped.

Responding to the repeated requests of her children from abroad, the Holy Mother made her first world tour during May-August 1987. She travelled widely in the U.S.A, and Europe. The impact was wonderful. The Holy Mother inspired and transformed many people who experienced her unique spiritual charm and universal love on a vast scale. In December 1987, the Holy Mother visited Reunion Island and Mauritius at the request of the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Centre, which has been functioning there well since 1985 under the leadership of one of her disciples. Subse-

quently, the Holy Mother made two more world tours in 1988 and 1989.

To those blessed souls who find their way to Mother's Holy Presence, she graciously advises them;

"Beholding a block of stone, a master sculptor will see only the beautiful form latent in it ignoring its rough exterior. Likewise, a God-Realised Soul sees only the ever-shining Atman or Self in all without distinction, ignoring the external differences. A drunkard cannot propagate prohibition of liquor. He should himself abstain from drinking first and then onlv can he ask others to do the same. Likewise, mv children, only after you yourselves become morally and spiritually perfect and behold Divinity in all, can you teach others to become so."

Let this life story of the Holy Mother be concluded with her loving call to the entire human race:

Come quickly my darling children,you who

are the Divine Essence of 'OM'.Removing all

sorrows,grow to be adorable and merge
with the sacred "OM"!

PART 2

The Meaning Of The Divine Bhavas

The Divine Bhavas of the Holy Mother as Krishna and Devi is a subject which needs a deep and analytical study even though it is, in truth, beyond the reach of the human intellect. This would help the readers to get a glimpse into the Holy Mother's infinite spiritual power. Responding to the sincere call of the devotee, God or a Perfect Master slowly reveals His infinite attributes within His devotee's heart lotus. When the process of self-purification becomes more and more intense, the Guru's greatness, which is nothing but the True Nature of the disciple or devotee, will be gradually revealed by the Grace of the Master. Grace, of course, is the first and foremost thing which one needs to understand the significance of the Holy Mother's Divine Moods.

The Great Masters of India have classified the concept of Divine Incarnations under three main categories: l)Purna Avatara (full or perfect), 2)Amsa Avatara (partial manifestation) and 3)Avesa Avatara (temporary overshadowing by divine power). The word 'Avatara' means coming down or descent. A Puma Avatara is the descent of the nameless, formless and immutable Supreme Energy assuming a human form and manifesting infinite power without any limitations. The intention of such a One will be to restore and preserve righteousness (dharma) and uplift humanity by making it aware of the higher Self. Amsa Avatara is the coming down of God while partially manifesting some of His power in order to fulfill a particular purpose or goal. The Incarnations of Lord Vishnu as Vamana (the Dwarf) and Narasimha (Man-lion) are typical examples of Amsa Avataras.

Avesa Avatara is entirely different from the above two types of Incarnations. This is the temporary visitation or possession by divine beings who use the body of some people in order to fulfill certain tasks. Lord Vishnu's Incarnation as Parasurama as depicted in the epic Srimad Bhagavata, comes under this heading. Here, the Lord entered the body of Parasurama who was a great warrior in order to destroy the cruel kshatriya kings who had become very arrogant and egoistic. Soon after fulfilling this task the power left him. It is said that

Sri Rama, another Incarnation of Lord Vishnu, took the divine power back from Parasurama while returning to Ayodhya after his marriage with Sita.

It is said that demons and ghosts will possess the body of people who are mentally weak. People who are predominantly virtuous and good in nature (sattvic) will get possessed by devas (minor gods), those endowed with creativity and vigour (rajasic) will be possessed by celestial beings (those beings inferior to minor gods) and people whose nature is full of darkness and obscurity (tamas) will be possessed by evil spirits. It is also told that in the body of a few rare souls who are extremely pure. Divine Power will manifest for a short period of time. This is why Parasurama is considered to be an Avesa Avatara.

The following is an illustration which might help the reader to gain insight into the Holy Mother's Divine Bhavas. Once upon a time when Lord Krishna was living in Dwaraka he cherished a desire to see his dear devotee Hanuman. His vehicle Garuda, the king of birds, was sent as his messenger to Kadali Vanam where Hanuman was residing, but Hanuman refused to go. He explained, "I won't go to see anyone other than my Lord Rama". When the reply of Hanuman was conveyed to Lord Sri Krishna, He once again sent the bird chief to Hanuman saying, "You go and tell him that Lord Sri Rama with His holy consort Sita have come to Dwaraka and They would like to see Hanuman."

While Garuda was fetching Hanuman, certain happenings were taking place in Dwaraka. Lord Krishna, by His mere Will, assumed the form of Lord Rama who lived aeons ago. Rukmini, Krishna's consort, became Sita. By this time, Hanuman arrived in Dwaraka and having seen his beloved Sri Rama and Sita and having offered worship to Them, returned to his abode.

Though Sri Rama was also one among the Incarnations of Lord Vishnu, He lived in Ayodhya thousands of years before Sri Krishna's lifetime. Yet Hanuman, the great devotee of Lord Rama, did not doubt how Lord Rama and Sita could

appear in Dwaraka even though the all-knowing Hanuman was fully aware of the fact that Krishna was the Lord of Dwaraka. Certainly Hanuman knew that no one except Krishna could manifest Rama Bhava. What really happened was that Hanuman was determined to use this opportunity to see his Lord with Sita in human form once again. Lord Krishna, the servant of His devotees, happily fulfilled His great devotee's wish and blessed him.

Only a Purna Avatara can become one with any other God or Goddess. Being such an Avarara, Krishna easily manifested Rama Bhava. One day. Lord Krishna asked His wives including Satyabhama, one among His dear ones, to assume Sita Bhava, but none were able to. Finally Rukmini, an Incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi, effortlessly assumed Sita Bhava.

In the case of an Avesa Avatara, godly powers enter into a particular person and after fulfilling the intended goal, retreat. This was not the case with Sri Krishna and Rukmini. What Lord Krishna had done was to manifest Rama Bhava or the attributes of Rama which were already potential in Him. There is a similar incident in the life of Lord Chaitanya of Bengal.

One day Pandit Srivasa, an ardent devotee of Lord Narasimha, was performing his usual chanting (mantra japa) while sitting in his family shrine room. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. “Who is that?" the pandit asked. “Behold the Beloved Deity who is being worshipped by you," came the reply. Pandit Srivasa opened the door and beheld Lord Chaitanya standing before him on the threshold of the house in a divine mood. He entered the shrine room and sat on the seat which was specially made for worship. The pandit saw the Lord Narasimha shining within Lord Chaitanya and with great devotion worshipped Him in Lord Chaitanya’s form. Lord Chaitanya blessed the pandit's family by permitting all of them to take part in the worship.

After everyone had received his blessings. Lord Chaitanya fell down unconscious. On regaining his external awareness after a few moments, he asked the pandit, “What happened? I

cannot remember anything. Did I utter anything wrong?" With all humility, Srivasa prostrated before his Lord and said, "O Bhagavan, please do not delude this humble servant of Yours anymore. By Your Grace this humble servant was able to see who You are!" Hearing this. Lord Chaitanya graciously smiled in a gesture of confirmation. Many such incidents are there is Lord Chaitanya's life of his giving darshan to his devotees in diverse bhavas.

From the above illustrations one can clearly understand what Bhava Darshan is. Bhava Darshan is the manifestation of different Isvara Bhavas or Divine Moods by an Incarnation of God according to the wishes of the devotees. Anandamayi Ma who lived in Bengal used to manifest Krishna and Kali Bhavas while singing bhajans. These Bhavas manifested by Incarnations took place only on certain occasions to fulfill a particular end, especially in reponse to the ardent desire of their devotees. Moreover, they would last only for a short time. The Holy Mother Amritanandamayi manifests the Divine Moods three nights a week lasting for long periods of 10 to 12 hours depending upon the number of devotees present for Darshan. As far as the Holy Mother is concerned, this is her way of serving humanity, plunged as it is in the deep quagmire of worldliness.

Lord Chaitanya is said to have had two bhavas-that of a devotee in which mood he would be most frequently seen, and Bhagavat Bhava during which he would reveal his real state of Self-Abidance. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa also had the same. It is said that he even developed a small growth like a tail during the period of his spiritual practices in Hanuman Bhava. During the Holy Mother's Krishna and Devi Bhavas she brings out That which is within her and manifests those Divine Beings in order to bless her devotees. The Holy Mother once said regarding the same,

"Mother is not manifesting even an infinitesimal part of her spiritual power during the Bhavas. If is were to be manifested as it is, no one could come near!" She continues, "All

the deities of the Hindu Pantheon, who represent the numberless aspects of the One Supreme Being exist within us. A Divine Incarnation can manifest any of them by mere will for the good of the world. Krishna Bhava is the manifestation of the Purusha or Pure Being aspect and Devi Bhava is the manifestation of the Eternal Feminine, the Creatrix, the active principle of the Impersonal Absolute. Here is a crazy girl who puts on the garb of Krishna and after some time that of Devi, but it is within this crazy girl that both exist. However, it should be remembered that all objects having a name or form are mere mental projections. Why decorate an elephant? Why should a lawyer wear a black coat or why does a policeman wear a uniform and a cap? All these are merely external aids meant to create a certain impression. In a like manner. Mother dons the garb of Krishna and Devi in order to give strength to the devotional attitude of the people coming for Darshan. The Atman or Self that is in me is also within you. If you can realise that Indivisible Principle that is ever shining in you, you will become That."

Even now' there are some people who believe that Lord Krishna and Devi are visiting the Holy Mother's body three nights a week at the end of which They go out of her body. This misconception is due to the lack of correct understanding about the Holy Mother's Divine Moods. These Divine Bhavas are nothing but the external revelation of her incessant Oneness with the Supreme. 'This has nothing to do with possession or Divine Grace as is commonly understood.

Answering the queries of the devotees, the Holy Mother has explained many points relating to the Bhavas:

Devotee: *Many devotees say that Mother is the same during the Divine Bhavas and at other times. If this is so, then what is the significance of the Bhavas?*

Mother: During the time of the Bhava Darshan Mother will remove two or three layers (veils, so to say), so that the devotees can obtain a glimpse of the Supreme. Different

people have different kinds of belief. Mother's intention is to somehow help the people approach God. Some are interested only if they see Mother in the costume of Devi or Krishna. Not only that...very few people know anything about spirituality'. Some people find it difficult ro believe Mother's words during ordinary times, but if Mother says the same thing during the Devi Bhava they will believe.

Devotee: *Mother, is there any particular time for manifesting this Bhava?*

Mother: No, there is not. It can be manifested at any time. Mere will is enough.

Devotee: *Mother, why do you wear these costumes of Krishna and Devi?*

Mother: It will help the people to remember what Bhava is. Child, each attire is important in its own way. We are naked when we are born. Later, according to each country' and social custom, people adopt different kinds of dress. Whatever the dress, the person is the same. In this age people give much importance to dress. Mother will make this point clear through an anecdote. One man was cutting down a tree which was growing by the side of a road. Another man who happened to see him doing this said, "Don't cut down that tree!.It is wrong to do so, it is against the law." The man not only refused to stop cutting but also scolded him severely. The person who tried to prevent the hooligan from cutting the tree was a policeman. He departed but soon returned in his official dress. Even from a distance the mere sight of the policeman's cap was enough to make the hooligan flee without looking back. See the different impact created when he came in ordinary and then official dress. Therefore, special attire is needed to teach ignorant people. Likewise, the costumes of Krishna and Devi Bhavas. Some people who still feel dissatisfied even after talking to Mother for hours will feel fully content after conversing with her only for a coulplc of seconds during Bhava Darshan. They feel peaceful after having told all their worries directly to God."

Al! Incarnations are unique in nature. One cannot say that Krishna was greater than Rama or that Rama was greater than Buddha. Each of Them had Their own task to fulfill and adopted befitting ways to uplift humanity. But this does not mean that They had different visions of life. Their actions cannot be assessed using the measuring rod of our limited intellect and logic. We can get perhaps a glimpse of their greatness through pure intuition born of spiritual practice. The spiritual experiences gained by thousands of devotees through the Holy Mother throws much light on this Great Soul's inexplicable spiritual power. In the following pages we will share with the reader some of the divine experiences of the Holy Mother's devotees as related by them...

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PART 3

Experiences Of Devotees

EXPERIENCES OF DEVOTEES

Dr.D.N.Srivastava, Scientific Officer at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in Bombay writes about his experience with the Holy Mother:

"In my student days I had studied the life of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in which there were vivid descriptions of the flow of divine love from his lips, from his face and from his actions when he used to utter the Holy Names. For many years I had aspired to see someone with that much saturation of devotion. I came across many saints, some of them really sincere in their pursuit, but that intensity of radiant bliss was not found.

But when I came in contact with Mata Amritanandamayi and heard her songs the words of which I could not understand fully, even then I felt that I had found what I had been looking for since years. Even just by sitting beside her I could feel the spiritual current which is experienced in deep meditation. Her address to the Supreme by various Names reveals kaleidoscopically one after the other facets of the Infinite. Her simple explanation to many complex questions shows the clarity of her vision of the Reality. Her spontaneously oozing words impart wings to one's intuition to fly to the world of inner light where there are no doubts.

Even in this age of hypocrisy the number of dedicated seekers is not small, but the complete dissolution in the Universal Love which Mata Amritanandamayi symbolises is an extremely rare phenomenon."

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Sheeja is a 7 year old girl. The pet name given to her by the Holy Mother is 'Takkali' which means 'tomato'. Once she cherished an intense desire in her innocent young heart. "O God, if only I were fortunate enough to wear the crown which Amma uses during Krishna Bhava I would be so happy." But

she herself clearly knew that the fulfillment of her wish was all but impossible.

That year during Lord Krishna's birthday celebrations, Takkali came to the Ashram. The Holy Mother, who was standing at the boat jetty, took her by the hand and walked with her to the Ashram. There they came upon a group of children dressed in colourful costumes preparing to perform a folk dance reminiscent of Krishna's childhood sports in Vrindavan. Mother took Takkali into the temple and dressed her in beautiful clothes and finally put the crown which Mother wears during Krishna Bhava on Takkali's head. Now she looked like Krishna when He was a child! Placing her in the midst of the other children. Mother asked them to dance around her. Takkali was very happy about her great good fortune. Her dream came true. Even without being asked. Mother had understood her innocent wish and fulfilled it. God knows and fulfills the longings of the pure at heart.

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Nambisseri Bhargavi Amma was an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna. One day Lord Krishna appeared to her in a dream and said, "You are burning Me up." She didn't understand the meaning of this statement of the Lord. After a couple of days she came to the Holy Mother's Ashram. The Mother during Krishna Bhava told Bhargavi Amma, "You have locked Me up in the cupboard and so you are burning Me up." Bhargavi was very much amazed to hear the same words from the Holy Mother which she had heard from the Lord's mouth during the dream. Suddenly she realised the meaning of Krishna's words. The portrait of Sri Krishna which she worshipped for a long time was then locked up in the cupboard. Some time ago when she had gone to stay with her daughter she had locked up the portrait in the cupboard to protect it from the attack of insects and worms. Bhargavi had

forgotten to take it out from the cupboard and to start her worship when she returned. It was sitting in there for a long time. Hearing these words and understanding her mistake she burst into tears and sought forgiveness from Krishna. Now Bhargavi was fully convinced that there was no difference between Lord Krishna, her Beloved Deity, and the Holy Mother.

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The Holy Mother always used to be in the company of small children with whom she would play and spend her time merrily like a small child herself. She had a great liking for them and vice versa. One little girl among them named Shayma lived nearby and suffered from breathing troubles. Once it so happened that she had a severe attack and was rushed to the hospital by her grandmother, but unfortunately they reached there too late. Hearing the verdict of the doctors that she was dead and overcome by grief and weeping aloud, the grandmother came straight to the shrine and laid the dead body of the child on the sacred seat on which Mother would sit during darshan times. Mother, who was then absorbed in singing devotional songs in another house, immediately felt restless and stopping the singing abruptly, hastened to the temple. When she reached there, she found the old grandmother weeping and wailing and noticed the dead body of the little girl on the seat. "Oh Mother, please save the child" begged the wailing lady. Mother then sat on the floor and taking the child on her lap, meditated for a long time. By and by, the small girl opened her eyes and gradually revived, 'fears of joy rolled down the checks of the grandmother's face and she embraced the Holy Mother again and again.

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Bindu, a fourteen year old girl and her parents were very devoted to the Holy Mother. They were from a village named

Kattoor which is about 70 kilometre east of Vallickavu. They have had many experiences with the Holy Mother which we think would be a great source of inspiration for the readers.

A devotee who visited their house one day expressed his wish to hear about their experiences with the Holy Mother. When persistently asked, Bindu said,

“Whenever I called the Mother she would come near me. One day father and mother went to Vallickavu leaving me alone at home. That evening while I was offering my daily prayers to the Mother while sitting in the family shrine room I burst into tears and asked the Mother, ‘Is it not because I am a girl that I have less freedom? If I were a boy, I could have visited my Mother all alone without anybody’s help.’ What happened next was unbelievable. To my wonder, the Mother appeared right in front of me. It took me a couple of seconds to believe that the Holy Mother herself was standing in flesh and blood before me. In my excitement I couldn't speak even a word to the Mother. I even forgot to offer my salutations to her. Before I could say anything she disappeared. I felt very happy and blessed thinking that even though my parents did not take me to the Mother's Ashram, the compassionate Mother, hearing my prayers, mercifully came near me."

Bindu's mother was also waiting for a chance to narrate her own experiences of the Holy Mother. She said,

“Several times I have experienced the same fragrance which would be smelt in the temple where the Holy Mother sits in Bhava. One day I had a wonderful experience. Even you may find it difficult to believe, but it really happened. I have seen it with my own eyes. There is no proof more than that. It was daytime and I was standing in the front verandah of the house. Suddenly a woman in white clothes was seen approaching the house through the front gate. Her head was also covered with a white cloth. I closely watched her. To my amazement I found that it was the Holy Mother coming to our house. My hairs stood on end. I was so thrilled that I could not even move from the spot where I was standing. There wasn't anybody else with her, she was alone. I have clearly seen Her

coming up to the front yard of the house and then suddenly disappear. Coming out of the house in a haste I looked all around for her but she could not be seen anywhere."

After a short pause she said, "It is still more wonderful to hear Bindu's experience while attending exams." The devotee's curiosity' was roused and he asked Bindu to narrate the incident. "Among the prescribed subjects for studies," she said, "chemistry and physics were too difficult for me to grasp. I was really perplexed when I received the question paper on the science subject. Sitting in the examination hall, I sincerely prayed to the Holy Mother to help me. The next moment to my wonderment I clearly saw the Mother sitting beside me. I thought that my eyes were playing tricks and so I looked again and again, but the Mother was really sitting near me. It seemed that nobody else in the examination hail could see her. Again, I had the feeling that it must be a hallucination or projection of my own mind. The next moment, as if to convince me, the Mother started talking to me. She explained how to answer the questions and encouraged me. She even instructed me how to answer the difficult questions. The same thing happened the next day as well. The Mother would come and sit near me everyday, instructing me how to answer the difficult questions from the day of the commencement of the examinations until the last day. When the examination results were announced I was even more surprised to see that I got a pass scoring higher marks than expected."

Returning to the Ashram, the devotee explained what he had heard from Bindu and her mother to the Holy Mother. For clarification, he asked her how this could happen. The Holy Mother smilingly replied, "Who knows? It might be that daughter's innocent faith!"

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Nothing is impossible for God. By God's Grace the dumb speak, the deaf hear and the lame climb mountains. Both Mr. Ramankutty, a highschool headmaster who resides in

Kayamkulam about 15 miles from the Ashram, and his wife Saradamba have unshakeable faith in the Holy Mother and have had a number of experiences revealing her ineffable spiritual power.

In 1980 there occured a theft in Ramankutty's relatives' family temple. They took refuge at the Holy Mother's feet. Mother told them that within a certain period of time they would get all of the stolen articles back which in fact happened. Through them Ramankutty came to know about the Holy Mother. He went to see her accompanied by his wife and their youngest daughter Lekha. Lekha was deaf and dumb from birth itself. Treatment after treatment were tried but to no avail. Mother consoled them in a loving and affectionate wav.

One month after visiting the Holy Mother, Lekha started uttering the word 'Amma' and in due course her speech and power of hearing slowly increased. This vast change in her condition made her parents into ardent devotees of the Holy Mother.

Other miraculous incidents took place in the life of Ramankutty' and his wife after coming to Amma. In 1982, when Amma visited Cape Comorin at the southern tip of India, she called them to accompany her. During Krishna Bhava, when Ramankutty expressed his fear that no one would be there to look after his house and children, the Holy Mother reassured him saying. "Don't worry. I will look after everything. Only I should be offered My usual banana and milk everyday in the shrine room." Before leaving the house, the couple cut down a big unripened banana bunch from their vegetable garden and, after covering it with a sack, hung it from the ceiling of the store room to ripen.

After the pilgrimage everyone returned to the Ashram. It was Bhava Darshan day. Both the husband and wife decided to stay for the Darshan and then return home. When Ramankutty approached Amma who was in Krishna Bhava, she smilingly said, "I have tasted all the bananas. Don't beat the children. I didn't eat any of them but just licked them all.

''Unable to understand the meaning of Mother's words, Ramankutty left for home. After reaching there he remembered about the banana bunch kept for ripening. He took the storeroom key from its hiding place and opened the room. What he saw there was astonishing. The sack used to cover the bananas was lying on the floor and all of the bananas were on it forming a perfect circle! How could this happen? The sack was securely tied around the bunch with a rope. Thinking that it must be some mischief done by his children he called them and questioned them. Inspire of their professions of innocence, he tied their hands behind their backs and beat them.

During the next Darshan day when Ramankutty entered the shrine room where Mother was standing in Krishna Bhava, he saw her standing there as if with her hands tied behind her back. She said to him, "Go ahead and beat Me. I am ready to bear it. I am the one who plucked the bananas from the bunch because the children didn't offer Me My usual banana and milk every' day!" Mother was standing in exactly the same pose as Ramankutty''s children had been in when he had beaten them. Both he and his wife shed tears of joy thinking of their great good fortune in having the Holy Mother as their God, Guru and Mother all in one.

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Ramamurti of Madurai in Tamil Nadu was a truck driver. Occasionally he would vist Kerala in connection with his job and also would go to various pilgrim centers in the state. Hearing about the Holy Mother in 1975, he came to her Ashram.

Nine years back, his five year old daughter suddenly disappeared. All of his efforts to find her ended in vain. As he narrated his sorrowful tale to the Holy Mother, he heaved deep sighs. Lovingly consoling him she said, "Don't worry, you will get your daughter back." He believed in her words. Now and then, whenever he would come to Kerala he would never forget to visit the Holy Mother. One day Mother gave

Ramamurti some flowers and said, “Within a month you will get your daughter back. ”

One day during his travels, Ramamurti stopped his truck in a market place in Madras. He saw a few people gathered around a girl of about 14 or 15 years of age who was crying over her lost money which she had kept for purchases. Some people tried to console her saying that they would themselves give her the lost amount but she refused to accept it. The poor girl continued weeping.

Ramamurti lovingly asked her name. On hearing it, he became surprised. It was the same name as his missing daughter’s. He looked very’ closely at her face and was overwhelmed with joy to find that it was indeed his missing daughter. He said, “Child, I will take you back to your home. Don't worry’ about the money. I will tell them all about it. ” The girl agreed and so Ramamurti drove the truck to the girl's house.

It was a big house owned by a rich landlord. With great hesitation Ramamurti told all about his past to the landlord. After hearing the story’, with great feeling the landlord replied, “About ten years ago while I was returning home in my car after a short journey I saw a crying child standing by the side of the road. I asked her several questions but she would neither tell me where she came from or how she became lost. She only told me her name by which we continued to call her. She was alone in that place and I was utterly ignorant of her place of residence. Since I had no children, I brought her home with me and raised her as my own child. When there is no one to do the daily purchases we send her to the market and that is how you found her there. ”

Understanding Ramamurti’s feelings, the landlord happily gave him permission to take back his daughter even though he was sad to lose his adopted daughter. Ramamurti was overjoyed. Mother's words turned our to be true as he got his daughter back before the completion of the month. From that time onwards his faith in Mother became deep and firm.

Rukmini Amma resides in Quilon about 35 kilometres from the Holy Mother's Ashram. Due to high blood pressure the right side of her body became completely paralysed and she became bedridden in 1978. She underwent all kinds of Allopathic and Ayurvedic treatment for 3 years but to no avail. Large sums of money had to be spent for these treatments and medicines but finally she, her husband Achutan Pillai and their relatives became utterly disappointed.

It was at this time that they heard of the Holy Mother and decided to take Rukmini Amma to the Ashram. After bringing her in a car, two strong men carried her into the Ashram on a chair. As is Mother's custom, she gave her some sacred ashes as prasad, blessed her and sent her away without uttering even a word about her disease. Both the husband and the wife returned to the house dissatisfied with the apparently fruitless journey. The car stopped a few yards away from their house. Carried by some people, Rukmini Amma was brought just in front of the house. Then followed an incredible incident. Standing up and pushing aside her attendants, Rukmini Amma walked into the house. Unable to believe their eyes, her husband and the others stood motionless. Their happiness knew no bounds. Thenceforth, they became ardent devotees of the Holy Mother. Rukmini Amma slowly regained her health. Seeing her, it is difficult to believe that she is the same one who was completely bedridden with paralysis.

*****

Neelambaran is a pious man who is very devoted to the Holy Mother. He lives in a small village named Vawakkavu about 4 kilometres away from Mother's Ashram. On almost all Darshan days he would come to the Ashram with a beautiful garland of fragrant flowers for the Holy Mother. Though his faith in the Mother was unshakeable, his wife's attitude was just the opposite. She would even scold him severely for going there.

One day in 1975, Neelambaran was ploughing a field situated near a road. Some other workers were also working in the same field. Neelambaran was telling them about his difficulties in making both ends meet. He said, “Today I don’t have even a penny to buy rice or other foodstuffs. ” Hearing this, the other workers teased him and mockingly said, “That girl in Vallickavu (the Holy Mother) will give you money. Wait till you get that! ” Everyone looked at Neelambaran and burst out laughing. Neelambaran turned pale and kept silent.

After a few moments, a small girl was seen walking towards Neelambaran. As if she was a close relative of his she smiled at him and stretched out her right hand in which there was a twenty rupee note. Without a second thought, Neelambaran accepted the money. “See you,” the girl said and walked away without uttering another word.

All the workers there had their own opinion about the probable source of the money. Some thought that it was a debt being repaid by someone while others thought that it was credit for some articles pledged. Yet, the fact was that none of them had ever seen her before. One of the workers asked, “Neelambaran, who was that girl?”

Neelambaran hesitated. He was trying to figure out wherefrom the money had come. He stood there like a statue utterly confounded holding the money in one hand and thinking of the strange girl. His eyes were fixed on the path by which the girl had walked away. Hearing the question of his co-worker Neelambaran, as if in a dream said, “I am also wondering about the same.” All were surprised. The girl had gone away. Who she was and from where she came nobody knew. It remained a mystery for Neelambaran and his friends.

The next Darshan day when Neelambaran visited the Ashram, the Holy Mother lovingly and with much affection said to him, “Did the Mother Goddess give you a twenty rupee note yesterday? My child, it was Mother who came to you and gave you the money.” Neelambaran's heart overflowed with Divine Love and embracing the Holy Mother's feet, he shed tears like a child.

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Francis Daniel was an assistant locomotive driver working in the Southern Railways in Quilon. He narrates a thrilling experience of his after coming into contact with the Holy Mother.

“Before meeting the Holy Mother Amritanandamayi, I was an atheist. Indulging in all kinds of wicked deeds, I led a degraded life. Becoming closely associated with the Railway Union politics, I actively participated in many strikes against the Government. This created a lot of enemies for me. They accused me of several crimes and created false evidence in order to trap me. Due to their position and influence in the ruling party I was suspended from service in March 1978.

From then onwards, my life took a sharp turn for the worse. Having lost my job, I was thrown into the midst of difficulties coming from all directions. I found no way to make both ends meet. I lost all hope and led my life as an utterly disappointed man. I was about to have a complete nervous breakdown when at that time I heard about the Holy Mother from some of the railway officers. Due to their persistance, I went to see her at her Ashram in Vallickavu. At the very first sight of the Mother's radiant form I fell at her feet and cried aloud, "O Mother, save me and grant me refuge!' With great affection Mother said, "Son, don’t worry’. iMother will straighten out everything. All the false evidence created against you will be burnt to ashes?

Firmly believing in Mother's assurance, I peacefully sat in my home putting an end to all further efforts to get back my job. I continued visiting the Holy Mother and $1^{1/2}$ years passed thus. On one fine morning there appeared an article in the daily newspaper about a train accident. The train was proceeding to Madras when the accident occured. A fire broke out and burnt many things to ashes. Several passengers were killed. While reading the paper I was not at all aware of the blessing which the Mother had thus showered upon me.

Afterwards I came to know about the further details of the accident. It was on that same train that the officer who was appointed to enquire about the case lodged against me was

travelling carrying all the said false documents. In that accident all the false evidence and other forged materials were burnt to ashes. Owing to lack of proper documentation, the court suspended the petition filed against me and I regained my job. These incidents completely transformed my life and helped me to have perfect faith in the unconditional power of God."

Dattan the Leper

Boundless compassion is the nature of God. He discards none. His heart is like the expansive sky wherein the whole universe with all its beings can be accomodated. The never ending stream of His love and compassion embraces and envelopes every moving and unmoving creature in the world.

All the great saints and sages of the past and present are embodiments of Divine Love and Compassion. One who meets the Holy Mother Amritanandamayi can experience this all-consuming and all-embracing love and compassion of God. The following narrative exemplifies this fact.

Dattan was born and brought up in Perumpally near Kayamkulam in Kerala. When he was very young he became a victim of the terrible disease of leprosy. His own parents and relatives turned him out of the house. Finding no other way to earn a livelihood, Dattan became a beggar. He begged his food and spent his days and nights in a temple compound. In the course of time, his whole body was covered with infected wounds oozing pus. Dattan said, "My eyesight was almost lost. In the place of my eyes there were oply two small slits. The hair from my head fell out. Nobody would give me any food. I was not allowed to travel in a bus. Always I used to cover my body with a piece of cloth but even that would stick to my body and stink owing to the pus and blood oozing out from the putrid-smelling wounds. Even fellow beggars wouldn't allow me to eat and sleep near them. Insects and flys would always fly around me and disturb me. At the mere sight of me people would hold their nose and walk away. I neither heard a

loving word nor saw a compassionate face for years together. Everybody hated me and would spit on seeing my ugly looking body and face. I led an utterly miserable and dejected life. All my hopes to live almost ended.

It was at this juncture that I heard of the Holy Mother in Vallickavu. I went there during a Bhava Darshan day but no one would let me go inside to see the Mother. Full of abhorrence, the people said, “Go away, go away.” Such was the foul smell produced by my wounds. But the Holy Mother called me aside and consoled me and treated me like her own child just as she was treating everyone else.”

It was a blood-curdling sight to watch the Holy Mother licking his pus-infected wounds, sucking the pus and blood from them. On all Bhava Darshan days, she would give him a bath pouring pots of water on his head. She would smear sacred ash all over his body and would treat him with the same amount of love, affection and compassion which she would show to other devotees. Witnessing the Holy Mother’s way of attending him, some devotees would vomit, some would faint, others would watch with awe and reverence, and some would shed tears of love and devotion due to the realisation that they were sitting in the holy Presence of the Divine Mother Herself. Other than Her, who could show such equal love? The Holy Mother says about Dattan, “Who else is there to take care of him and to love him? Mother doesn’t see his external body. She sees only his heart. I cannot discard him. He is my son and I am his mother. Can a mother abandon her son?”

Now Dattan is a changed man. Almost all his wounds have healed. The Holy Mother’s spittle is his divine medicine. His eyes have opened and he can see clearly now. Hair has also grown on his head. He can travel in a bus and people will talk to him and serve him food. Though the scars of the terrible disease still remain on Dattan's body there is no more blood or pus oozing from them nor is there any putrid smell. He can wear a shirt or a loincloth without it sticking to his body and causing him pain. Now he is happy. The Holy Mother has

given him a new birth. His life has found meaning through her blessings.

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Kuttappan Nair, a retired head constable says, “What I am narrating below is one of the numerous experiences I had with Mother. My family and myself have been householder devotees of Mother for the past eight years. Five years ago, one night during Bhava Darshan Amma pointed out to me that some of the planets were not in a favourable position for me. On requesting Amma to tell me a solution for that, she advised me to observe a vow of silence on ail Saturdays. This was on a Thursday. On Friday, as I had been to the hospital to see my daughter who was in the maternity ward, I could not observe the vow of silence the next day, i.e. Saturday. That day, a hen which did not have any disease died in my house. The next Saturday also, unfortunately, I could not observe the vow of silence. That day, our pct puppy died. I could not observe silence on the third Saturday also. That day a one and a half year old calf in our house died. It was then that I remembered about Amma’s instruction to observe the vow of silence.

The next day, I proceeded to Vallickavu. When I prostrated before Amma during Bhava Darshan, Amma said, “You have not observed the vow which I advised. Already three deaths have taken place in your house. In future, if you do not observe the vow, more unpleasant happenings and misfortune will happen.”

On the next Saturday, early morning after bath, I offered prayers at the Devi temple near our house, came back home and sat in meditation in the pooja room. Saturday being a holiday for schools, my grandchildren and nephew were all home in the next room. When they started making noise, I scolded them forgetting about my vow. After that, I continued my vow of silence. I spent the entire day in the pooja room except for going out four times for breakfast, lunch, tea and supper.

The next day I went to Vallickavu. During Bhava Darshan, Amma caught hold of my ear and sternly rebuked me saying "Is this how you observe silence?" I asked for forgiveness saying that in my anger at the children I had forgotten about my vow. Amma then told, "It is not that. If you observe a vow without fasting, no good can come of it." Again, I asked for forgiveness saying that I did not know the rules to be followed while observing a vow. Amma advised me to observe a vow only from morning till evening and during that time to take only water, milk and coconut juice. If hunger became unbearable, fruits were allowed. On requesting Amma to forgive my mistakes and asking her to remove all obstacles, she gave me a mantra. Ever since I started chanting that mantra I am able to observe silence on Saturdays without any hindrance.

Three years back in the month of May, on a Saturday at around 11 o'clock in the morning, I was meditating in my pooja room. On seeing a crow pecking and eating a ripe jack fruit my grandaughter came to me asking to pluck it.for her. Coming out of the pooja room, I went to the tree with a hacking knife. As I hacked the stem of the jackfruit which was low enough for me, the knife missed its target, hit the tree and slipping out of my hands hit me a little above my left eye. The eye started bleeding profusely. I covered the wound with my dhoti. Luckily, my nephew who happened to reach there on his cycle, took me to the hospital where the wound was cleaned and bandaged. Still I managed to observe silence.

At the same time in Vallickavu, Amma called my son who at that time was residing there and told him "Go home immediately. Father has met with a minor accident. There is nothing to worry about though, Amma has averted it." If the wound had been a little to the right, it would have been in the centre of my forehead. If it had been a little below, the knife would have hit my left eye.

I came back from the hospital and after sometime my son came rushing in asking "Where is father? What has happened to him?" When we asked him how on earth he came to know about it, he related to us what Mother told him."

Sri R.Reddiar, who resides in Quilon, a town which is about 35 kilometres from Vallickavu, narrates his experience with the Holy Mother as follows: -

“A girl who belonged to our family ran away from the house sometime before. As instructed by friends and well-wishers, we went to see the Holv Mother and told her about the girl who was missing. The Mother said, “The girl will be back home seven days from today. You don’t have to go anywhere searching for her.” The Holy Mother gave seven wicks to us and instructed us to light one each day. She continued, “On the seventh day, when you light the last wick, the officials will inform you about the girl’s whereabouts.’

Without being fully convinced by the Mother’s words, we again ran here and there in search of her but got no news at all. We were very distressed at heart especially because of the fact that she was a girl. Greatly disappointed, we again approached the Holy Mother. She asked us, “Why did you simply waste so much money? Mother has already told that you will get the girl back. Don't be anxious. You must be firm. As told before, you will get the girl back.”

Six days were over and we had burnt six wicks as told by the Holy Mother. On the seventh day, we had lit the last wick during the twilight hour. While it was burning in the oil lamp the phone rang. One among the family members attended it. The message was as follow: "Your child is under the custody of the Madras Police. The girl, in order to sell a gold ornament, went to the shop of a goldsmith. Feeling doubtful about her, he informed the police.’

Thus exactly at the correct time as told by the Holy Mother we got information about the lost girl who was handed over to us soon after. From that time onwards we are living surren- dering everything at the Holy Mother’s Feet. We firmly be- lieve that the Mother will protect us.”

Kunjamma resides in Kayamkulam about 12 kilometres distant from Mother's Ashram. The following is an incident which greatly strengthened her devotion to the Holy Mother. A couple of years before coming to the Holy Mother Kunjamma's husband suddenly died as was foreseen in his horoscope. Thus, Kunjamma developed a strong belief in astrology. Leading a miserable life after the death of her husband, she became still more sorrowful when she came to know from her son's horoscope that he would die at the age of 23 from snake bite. To find a solution and to save her son from this ill fate, Kunjamma went to several places. Finally, she came to the Holy Mother and sought refuge at her feet. The Mother consoled her saying "Don't worry. Mother will give a mantra to chant daily. Once a week observe a vow for your son. Vows observed by mothers for their children will have more power Your son's death will get transferred to one of your domestic animals. Go and be peaceful."

Kunjamma was not fully convinced of the Holy Mother's words. Everyday she would see dreams that her son had died from the bite of a snake. After the death of her husband, Kunjamma raised a dog to guard the house. One day, she heard the barking and howling of her pct dog from the front yard of the house followed by the hissing sound of a snake. Full of dread she opened the door a little and peeped out. There she saw the dog and a snake desperately fighting each other. Beholding the fearful sight, she immediately closed the door and sat inside. After a couple of minutes the hue and cry slowly died down. Kunjamma, full of fear, slowly opened the door and much to her amazement found both the dog and snake lying dead.

Though she felt a bit dejected about her pct dog's death, she suddenly remembered the Holy Mother's words,"Your son's death will be transferred to one of your domestic animals," and was very grateful to the Mother. This incident happened exactly during the period which her son was supposed to die according to the horoscope. Kunjamma, full of love and reverence, saluted the Holy Mother mentally. When the

Holy Mother's words came perfectly true Kunjamma's faith in her also strengthened. Her son is still alive and leading a happy life with the blessings of the Holy Mother.

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One day in 1980 Chandramati, who resides on the other side of the backwaters in Vallickavu, came to the Holy Mother's Ashram to receive her blessings. The Holy Mother was receiving the devotees one by one. Suddenly she closed her eyes and sat in an unconscious mood for sometime. Her body became motionless. The devotees anxiously waited and within a couple of minutes the Mother came back to her usual state. Calling Chandramati aside, the Holy Mother said, "Your grandchild just died, but the anguished cry of your daughter led Mother there. He came back to life just then."

Chandramati did not fully understand the import of the Holy Mother's words until she came to know the incident which simultaneously occurred in her daughter's house exactly at the same time. Chandramati's daughter Nalini lived about 10 kilometres from the Ashram and was also an ardent devotee of the Holy Mother. She had only one son who was then 6 years of age. He suddenly became acutely ill and died on the spot before any medical aid could be provided. There arose an uproar in the house. Nalini, beating her chest and crying loudly supplicated thus, "O Mother, for how long am I calling You and worshipping You sincerely? Is this the fruit of my prayers? Who else is there for me in this world? O Mother, why did You take this my only son, why did you take this only son of mine?"

Immediately a flash of lightning was seen near the corpse of Nalini's son. Within a few seconds, the child came back to life as if he was waking up after a deep sleep. Chandramati then related to her daughter what the Holy Mother had told her in the temple and they both then realised that it was only by the Grace of the Holy Mother that the child's life had been restored. Shedding tears of joy, they both reverently saluted the Holy Mother.

The Holy Mother has blessed many childless couples who were unable to bear children for many years by giving them a baby by her divine resolve (sankalpa). Such couples would come and take refuge at the Holy Mother's feet. Sincere prayer and unshakeable faith in all circumstances are the two most important factors which enable the supplicants to gain the fruit of their life long wish. The refugees also should have self-confidence, mental strength and devotion to confront the trials and tribulations which may occur during the course of pregnancy. The Holy Mother on her part is very strict in choosing the people who really deserve it. This selection of the Holy Mother entirely depends on various subtle considerations which are beyond the realm of human intellect. Even then, there are several devotees who were fortunate enough to receive this great blessing from the Holy Mother. Among them, here we narrate the birth of four such children.

Shakti Prasad 1

Vidyadharan and Omana who reside in Vavvakkavu which is 5 kilometres away from Vallickavu were deeply dejected for not having a child even after 9 years of married life. Their parenthood hankered to fondle a child. The sweet smile and prattle of a child was just a dream for them which would never come true. It was at this juncture that Sarasamma, Omana's elder sister and an ardent devotee of the Holy Mother, told her about the Mother. In 1977 Omana came to the Holy Mother's Ashram accompanied by Sarasamma. When her turn came Omana entered the temple and went near the Mother. Before mentioning anything about her unfortunate life, the Holy Mother consoled Omana saying "Daughter, you came here to gain a baby- Mother will remove your sorrow. Within four months the child will take form in the womb. " Having full faith in the Holy Mother's words Omana happily returned home. The Holy Mother's words came true. Within four months, symptoms of pregnancy appeared in Omana. Vidyadharan, Omana and their relatives were over-

joyed. For 9 years they had been praying and dreaming for a child, and now their life long wish was going to materialise.

In those days, Omana was working in a cashewnut factory. When Omana was 4 months pregnant, she was taken to a doctor and it was confirmed that the foetus was alright. In the ninth month she was again examined and was atonished to hear the doctor's report that she was not pregnant! The most surprising thing was her enormous belly which remained unchanged. Omana, her husband and other members of the family were extremely worried. She was taken to another hospital where several gynocologists examined her and found no sign of a baby in the womb. The doctors were astounded. It appeared very strange even to them. A woman with all external symptoms of pregnancy but no trace of a child in the womb. At last one doctor, a specialist in gynocology, took an X-ray of the mother's womb and was surprised to see dense smoke on the film instead of a foetus. All of them were astonished and at the same time curious to know the explanation. The perplexed relatives took Omana to another hospital in Quilon. All the tests were again repeated. The doctors failed to make a final decision. When there was no sign of a baby in the womb, Omana's relatives became utterly disappointed. Yet Omana, who had unwavering faith in the Holy Mother, was optimistic. One day they came to see the Holy Mother and told her all about the doctors' report and the result of the X-rays. The Mother benignly smiled and said, “Be courageous, that child is God's son, not an image. They cannot take his photograph." Omana perfectly believed the Holy Mother's words.

The divine sport did not end there. Omana was ten months pregnant but she didn’t give birth even then. Days and months passed one by one. The situation didn't change. Omana was 13 months pregnant. The villagers abused and teased Omana and the Holy Mother saying “She is going to give birth to a baby elephant?" Some others cuttingly remarked, “O, this fishcrgirl has given her a great child; maybe it is a serpent!" Omana and her husband spent their days in

prayer and meditation. Their only succour and support was the Holy Mother. It was really a hard test for them. Sixteen months passed and still Omana had not given birth. The villagers continued their abuses and sometimes they would even use vulgar expressions. Surrendering everything at the Holy Mother's feet and observing strict vows, Omana held on to her unswerving faith.

Finally, one day during the sixteenth month, the Holy Mother asked Omana's relatives to take her to the hospital. Heeding the Mother's words, Omana was taken to the Victoria Hospital in Quilon. There was a big gathering to hear about this wonderful and extraordinary' delivery. Everyone anxiously waited for the result. Hearing from Omana's relatives that she was 16 months pregnant the doctors examined her thoroughly and were amazed to find that there was no baby in the womb even though all indications of pregnancy were physically present. They were in a dilemma. After much discussion, they finally decided on surgery'. When that was over they couldn't believe their eyes; there was a fully grown healthy child in the womb! After being in the mother's womb for 16 months he came out into the world. Named as Sakti Prasad (Blessing of the Supreme Energy) by the Holy Mother, he started to meditate and chant mantras when he was hardly three. Mother gave him a rudraksha rosary and a small seat made of grass. Seated on it, he would meditate sitting in a perfect yogic posture and would repeat the sacred mantras 'Om Namah Sivaya' and 'OM'. Whenever he would come to the Ashram, he would sit in the Holy Mother's presence without be prompted by anyone. Picking up some flower petals, he would go on offering them at the Holy Mother's feet. Often times, the Mother would say, "He has the eyes of a yogi." He won't speak much. He is not mischievous or naughty like ordinary children. In school he would tell his classmates that "You must meditate on Ammachi's form or else you will become sick!"

Shakti Prasad II

Another fortunate couple who received the benedictions of the Holy Mother to have an auspicious child is Ratnamma and her husband Krishnan who reside in Quilon about 35 kilometres from the Mother's Ashram. Ratnamma came to the Ashram in 1976. There was a particular incident which prompted her to visit the Holy Mother. Rccna, a Christian neighbour of Ratna was afflicted by continuous and agonising chest pain. Coming to know about the Holy Mother, one day Rccna went to see her. The sacred water and the ash given by the Holy Mother completely relieved Rccna of her chest pain. This experience of her neighbour induced Ratna, who was suffering from acute stomach pain, to seek the blessings of the Holy Mother. She came to Vallickavu and the Holy Mother gave her a banana during the Divine Mood. Ratna ate it and thereby the tormenting stomach pains which had troubled her for so many years stopped.

Ratna was married to Krishnan in 1971. Even after five years they had no children. Both of them were extremely sad over their bad luck. Ratna had never mentioned this desire of hers to the Mother. One day the Holy Mother told her, "Is it not your wish to beget a son? Mother will grant it. After 10 months, a son will be born to you."

As per the Holy Mother's words, Ratna became pregnant, even though the statements of the doctors and X-rays proved negative. Taking the doctors' words to be true, Ratna's husband Krishnan, out of frustration and resentment said, "I won't allow you to go to Vallickavy until the birth of the child." During this period in response to Ratna's intense prayers she would often receive visions of the Holy Mother.

Exactly on the date predicted by the Holy Mother, a shining male child was born to Ratnamma. Soon after he started speaking his mother tongue Malayalam, he would say that his real father is God and not Krishnan, his father by blood. Though born and brought up in a fishing village, Sakti Prasad would never eat fish or meat. Without fail he would meditate

every morning and evening. Sometimes he would sit for more than half an hour. On certain occasions, it was even necessary for someone to rouse him from meditation. Even from his infancy, it was the habit of Sakti Prasad io play making temples out of clay and he would worship Lord Siva and Goddess Parvathi.

One day, a stranger came to Sakti Prasad's house. Ratnamma's husband Krishnan was out of town. According to the custom, Ratna invited the guest to sit on the verandah and gave him a cup of coffee. All of a sudden, seven year old Sakti came forward and slapped him. Ratnamma immediately interfered and pushed him away. Sakti turned around and told his mother, "Mother, he is a thief. Don't let him sit here, don't give him coffee." Ratnamma asked "How do you know that he is a thief" Sakti replied, "By looking at his face." Hearing this, the thief who came in the guise of the guest, immediately left the place.

Sometimes Sakti Prasad will tell his mother, "You are not my mother. My mother is in Vallickavu," i.e. the Holy Mother). If anybody in his house or neighbouring houses become sick Sakti will approach them with basil leaves, sacred water and ash. After sprinkling the sacred water on their body, the symptoms of the illness will vanish. Unless his own intuition fells him to do so, Sakti will not do this even if asked.

One day, Sakti went to a neighbouring house and accidently knocked a piece of cake off the table. The girl in that house beat him. The next day, the girl along with her parents came to Sakti's house. Do you know why? The right arm of the girl with which she had beaten Sakti was swollen and causing her excruciating pain. She couldn't even move the hand. Presuming that it was a punishment for beating Sakti, they came to seek a solution. Ratnamma suggested to them to go and see the Holy Mother. The next day itself they came to visit the Holy Mother and apologized. After this, the girl's hand became normal.

From his youth itself, Sakti Prasad has been kind and merciful to others. If somebody in the neighbourhood is starving

for want of food he will bring them to his house and feed them. This nature of his has given a lot of trouble to his family who are financially unstable. If the family is hesitant to give them food, Sakti will feed them with his own share and will fast.

Ratnamma considers herself to be Sakti's foster mother. She raises him on behalf of the Holy Mother and considers the Mother to be his real mother.

Unnikannan (Sakti Prasad III)

Sarasan and his wife Tankam are from the same island on which the Holy Mother's Ashram is situated. Although many years had passed after their marriage, they were grief stricken due to not having a child. Having heard from someone about the Holy Mother and her divine powers, they took refuge in her and sincerely prayed for the fulfillment of their hearts desire. One day during her Divine Mood the Holy Mother told Tankam that she would become pregnant soon and within a few days she did indeed become pregnant. One night, when Tankam was three months pregnant, she suddenly had an attack of severe stomach pain followed by continuous bleeding. There were no hospitals or doctors nearby. The family became very distressed. Not knowing what to do, they became distraught. Unable to bear the pain, Tankam cried aloud. At that moment, to everyone's amazement, the Holy Mother walked into the room. She made some basil leaf extract and asked Tankam to drink it. Within a few seconds her stomach pain and bleeding stopped. How did the Holy Mother come to their house at that time of the night? The Holy Mother along with some other devotees were proceeding to another place on the island in a boat. When the boat reached near Tankam's house, all of a sudden the Holy Mother's mood changed and she seemed to be very restless. The next moment. Mother seriously insisted that she must get down at Tankam's house. The devotees in the boat tried to change the Holy Mother's mind as it was dark and the destination was still far awav, but Mother was adamant in her deci-

sion and thus the boat was anchored near Tankam's house. Divine plans are always mysterious.

During the course of pregnancy, when Tankam came one day to see the Holy Mother, the later said to her, "You will deliver on a dark night and there will be thunder and lightning followed by a heavy downpour." Exactly as Mother had told, Tankam gave birth to a beautiful male child at the Alleppy Medical College on a gloomy night with heavy rain and thunder. The electricity went off in the hospital. Darkness prevailed everywhere in the building But everyone present near the child witnessed something exceptional. It was the shining brilliant eyes of the child piercing the darkness.

Named as Unnikannan by the Holy Mother, he grew up as an extraordinary child. He was endowed with a sharp intellect and a face radiating spiritual splendour. Though born and raised in the fisherman clan, he would never eat fish or meat. Sometimes he would ask questions concerning the significance of worship and such other religious practices. He would always act according to his own insights. Nobody would scold him or beat him even if he would do some mischief. If by chance he was beaten or scolded, then nobody would be able to sleep that night due to some mysterious disturbances. The Holy Mother once said, "I will give whatever he wants. " Unnikannan's parents have strong faith in the Holy Mother's assurance.

Sakti Prasad IV

Hasanu Kunju married Subaida when she was 16 years old. Sixteen more years had passed yet a child was not born to Subaida who was then 32. Her husband, who had undergone many treatments for an infected wound on his shin, went to see the Holy Mother in 1977. When the wound had completely healed due to the blessings of the Holy Mother, his wife Subaida also had become an ardent devotee of the Mother. Having lost all hope of getting a child, Subaida never opened her heart to the Mother. The doctors were of the opin-

ion that she would be unable to conceive a without undergoing an operation. But one day, understanding Subaida's heart, the Holy Mother told her, "You are dejected because you haven't had a child even after so many years. Mother will give a child to you." Within a short period of time Subaida became pregnant. Thus, Subaida conceived her first child in 1978 at the age of 32 after sixteen years of marriage. This was a remarkable occurance for the villagers and for Subaida's relatives. Owing to fear of protest and abuse from the Muslim community, Subaida and her husband kept the origin of this pregnancy a secret.

In 1979, Subaida gave birth to a resplendant male child. The parents named him Ansim. The neighbours called him Manikantan. The Holy Mother gave him the name Saktiprasad. He is a phenomenal child endowed with a brilliance and unusual vitality. He attracts the attention of everyone. The Holy Mother alone knows about his bright future.

About the birth and future of these children, the Holy Mother says, "During meditation, a power emits from me and enters into the mother's womb and thus they become pregnant. Some of them will become perfect sannyasins. Some others will lead a family life. Wherever they may be, finally they all will turn to spirituality."

Hearing this truth, many of the mothers of these children were feeling sad to think that after some years they would lose their sons for the service of mankind. Therefore, Mother promised them another child which would fulfill all of the expectations that parents usually have for their children, i.e. getting a job and leading a householder's life. Within the next few years, all of these mothers were blessed with another child.

Sarasamma lived with her husband and children in Karunagappally, a small town to the south of Vallickavu. They were leading a happy and contented family life when unexpectedly a great calamity befell them. They lost all their property and even the house in which they were living. They had to live on others liberality and generosity. It was at this juncture that they heard of the Holy Mother. Having taken refuge at her feet, all of the adversities which they had been facing since a long time got resolved one by one.

Sarasamma's faith in the Holy Mother became unshakeable. It was Sarasamma's experience that if a catastrophe were to occur in their house, the Holy Mother would warn them to take necessary care. To get nd of possible misfortunes Mother had given a mantra to chant and instructed her to take a particular vow every week.

One day when Sarasamma came to the Ashram the Holy Mother told her, "Daughter, Mother could see a death in your house. Don't stop your vow. Pray sincerely to God. Don't worry. Mother is always with you." Though Sarasamma was very worried, she had strong faith in the Holy Mother's saving grace. Soon the inevitable happened. A couple of days after the Holy Mother had given the warning, Sarasamma's eldest daughter was bitten by a viper. Immediately they brought the girl to the Mother's Ashram. By this time, the girl's whole body had changed its colour to blue. A mucilaginous substance mixed with saliva started coming from her mouth. Some thought that she was breathing her last and others felt that she was already dead.

The devotees tried to console Sarasamma who was sitting near her daughter shedding buckets of tears. The Holy Mother during Devi Bhava sent word that the girl should stay over night in the Ashram. Accordingly she was taken to another building situated on the northern side of the Ashram.

The next morning found no change in the girl. It seemed as if there was no sign of life in her. Surrounded by a group of devotees, Sarasamma was still sitting near her daughter.

Though she seemed as one utterly collapsed, her strong faith in the Holy Mother enabled her to gather some strength internally and still be hopeful.

All of a sudden, from somewhere a snake appeared in the front yard of the building and straightaway crawled towards the place where the girl was lying. Everyone present there became frightened and called out “Snake, snake! ” Suddenly the girl opened her eyes. By that time, the snake had reached very close to her. Seeing the snake with its hood raised, the girl jolted terribly and got up immediately. To everyone’s astonishment, all the symptoms of snake bite disappeared from the girl's body and she came back to life. The snake immediately crawled away from the spot. Later, Sarasamma and her daughter with overflowing devotion and love prostrated before the Holy Mother and left the Ashram before noon. Owing to the instance of her relatives, Sarasamma at a later date went to see a very famous astrologer. She gave him the necessary’ details about the time of birth, etc. of the concerned person but did not mention that the person was her daughter. Then she asked him about the future of the girl. Having made the astrological calculations, the astrologer said with great conviction, “This particular girl is no more. She had a death caused by poisoning. ” Sarasamma replied, “No, this is my daughter's horoscope and she is still alive. ” The astrologer who had strong faith in his science and ability could not believe Sarasamma's words. He thought for a moment and again made certain calculations and proclaimed, “Anyhow, I have no doubt that she was bitten by a poisonous snake during that particular time of her predestined death. If she is still alive, then it is a wonder and a rare blessing of God. ”

Sarasamma told, “Later we found that even in the horoscope written during her childhood, it was mentioned that she would die by poisoning at the age of 19. It was exactly at the same age that she was bitten by the snake. All I can say is that it is the boundless compassion of the Holy Mother that always protects us.”

In 1981, Sarasamma had another unforgettable experience of Mother's Grace which she narrated with deep emotion.

"In those days, the devotees who came for Mother's darshan would leave the Ashram around 4 a.m. in order to reach their houses. All the devotees would go in a group up to the bus stand about a half mile away and then take buses to their respective towns. My son Madhu and I boarded the bus and proceeded to our village. It was a New Moon night and although it was 5 o'clock in the morning when we neared the village, it was still pitch dark. I got out at a stop which I thought was just near to my house and presumed that my son also alighted from the bus. Immediately after stepping out of the bus the conductor rang the bell and the bus drove away into the darkness. Looking around, I could not find my son and realised that I had made a mistake. I was at a lonely place about 2 kilometres from my house. In the meantime, my son, on turning around in his seat, was shocked to find me not there. He alighted at the next bus stop and started running back to where I was standing, which was quite a distance away.

Perplexed and not knowing what to do. Mother's parting words came to my mind, 'Be very careful today'. I tightly held Mother's prasad in my right hand. In the meantime, I could see a lorry stopping a short distance away from which seven or eight men emerged and walked towards me. Perhaps they had seen a woman alighting from the bus in this lonely place. Surrounded by these burly looking rowdies, I was shivering with fear as they shot questions one after another at me and spoke using vulgar language. I thought that they may assault me any moment and a terrible fire raged within me. Is this the fate of those who go to see the Holy Mother? Is this the fruit of my life-long devotion? Such thoughts burned within making me oblivious of the surroundings and I shouted out ar the top of my voice 'yedi!' (O Mother?). This was a great shock to the rowdies who surrounded me.

What followed is difficult to express. Immediately and unexpectedly the effulgent form of the Divine Mother appeared before me in the sky with countless arms holding many weapons in Her hands. She was seated on an enormous creature and Her face, hair and crown exactly resembled those of Mata Amritanandamayi during Devi Bhava. The Holy Mother had assumed the terrible form of Kali in order to save Her devotee' Seeing this, I started to lose my external awareness. The Divine Mother stretched out Her hands towards me. My eyes became transfixed while gazing at Her radiant form and started to bulge out. My tongue stuck out like Mother Kali's and I felt a tremendous power pervade my body. An uproarious laughter burst out from within me the mere remembrance of which sends shivers through me. The air trembled with the terrible sound of my laughter. The rowdies who were about to pounce on me were taken aback on seeing that frightening form with dishevelled hair, bulging eyes, protruding tongue and a roaring laughter standing before them fearlessly. Perhaps they thought that I was an evil spirit instead of a human being! Losing all of their courage, they now decided to somehow escape and slowly backing up, got into their lorry and drove away posthaste.

Even after their departure, I was unable to move. Gradually, I started to regain my normal consciousness at which time the enchanting form of Mother Kali also disappeared. My body felt numb as if it were paralyzed. After a few minutes, I could move a little and the protruding tongue also withdrew into the mouth. Still I could not move my bulging and transfixed eyes but after massaging them for some time they became normal. My throat pained severely due to the roaring laughter. Looking down, I found that Mother's prasadam was still clasped in my hand.

A few more minutes and my son Madhu came running to the spot. 'Mother, what was that terrible roaring sound? Who were those men driving away in the lorry? Did they do anything to you?' But I could not answer him as I was still struggling to get back my speech which took some days to return to normal."

Although this incident took place in 1981, even now when Sarasamma narrates it she shivers with fear, her throat gets choked up with emotion and tears roll down her face while she utters again and again “Amma, Amma, Amma...”.

K.S.Gangadharan Vaidyar is a well known and proficient Ayurvedic doctor who lives in Alwaye, a town about 135 kilometres from Vallickavu. Both he and his wife are ardent devotees of the Holy Mother. In 1986, Dr.Gangadharan was suffering from an attack of severe neck pain. Day by day the pain increased until it became unbearable. Dr.Gangadharan says “Though being an experienced Ayurvedic doctor, I was unable to diagnose or cure the severe pain. To reduce the pain a little, I would wear a neck band. Finally, the racking pain became too much to bear and I decided to consult a bone specialist. The day before the appointment was fixed I visited the Holy Mother’s Ashram. It was a Sunday and was very crowded. When my turn came, I entered the temple where the Holy Mother was seated in Devi Bhava.

Having prostrated to the Mother, I hesitantly told her about the acute neck pain which I had been suffering from for a long time and for which I had undergone several treatments. The Holy Mother most affectionately rubbed the afflicted part a couple of times with her left hand and consoled me. Having received the Holy Mother's blessings, both myself and my wife returned home. Finally, we reached home by midnight, the excruciating pain persisting. But due to exhaustion caused by the journey I was able to sleep straight away. The next morning when I woke up amazingly enough I found that the pain had gone and to this day it has not returned.”

Dr. Gangadharan continued, “For the last 35 years I am working in the medical profession and have undergone different kinds of treatments to cure my neck pain, yet no cure was found. Whereas, the Holy Mother by her mere touch completely removed my pain forever.”

Dr. Gangadharan's sister, Sumathi, was suffering from severe stomach pain. She was 57 years old and a mother of 5 children. Many eminent and renowned doctors were consulted and the prescribed treatments were undergone. None of them were found to be effective. Finally, she was taken to a hospital near Trichur well known for its treatment of cancer. After examining the patient thoroughly the doctors arrived at the conclusion that she was suffering from cancer of the uterus.

During this period. Dr. Gangadharan and his wife were travelling in Europe visiting some friends and were unaware of the unfortunate fate of his sister. Upon their return from Europe, they were informed by their relatives of Sumathi's condition. Dr. Gangadharan narrated, "Hearing about my sister's pathetic condition myself and my wife rushed to the hospital. Upon seeing, us she burst into tears. After having consoled her we returned home and visited her again after one week. By that time the disease had reached its acute state. Helplessly watching my sister dying in excruciating pain, we could find no way to console her. The doctors were of the opinion that even if the uterus was removed it would be of no use as the disease had advanced too far and her whole systemn was affected.

The doctors decided to try to heal the cancer temporarily using radiation and chemotherapy. Soon news spread amongst the relatives that Sumathi was a serious cancer patient and there was no way to save her life. After having undergone the treatments, Sumati was brought to my house for taking complete bed rest. Still the pain remained the same. The racking pain disturbed her continuously which culminated in insomnia. Even her nature calls were affected due to the disease. All hopes of restoring her health and saving her life were given up.

At last, my wife suggested to seek refuge in the Holy Mother who is forever our Stay and Support and who would always stretch forth her blessed hands to protect us from such miseries. Accepting my wife's suggestion, we took Sumathi

to the Holy Mother's Ashram one Sunday, 'Die Holy Mother lovingly caressed Sumathi and rubbing the afflicted part, consoled her. Sumathi felt a great relief by the mere touch of the Holy Mother's hand.

The Holy Mother asked us to bring some tulasi leaf extract during our next visit to the Ashram. The next Darshan itself we brought it as per her instructions. Having blessed the extract and handing it over to the patient, the Mother asked her to take one teaspoon even' morning and evening. From the next day onwards, Sumathi followed Mother's advice. Astounding was the outcome; within a week Sumathi's pain disappeared and her disease was completely cured!

Both of these stories are my own personal experiences. There is no greater Guru than one's own experience. Even though these experiences seem as something great to me they are as nothing for the Holy Mother who is the embodiment of Infinite Power and who can cure the fatal disease of worldly existence itself."

Mr. Gopakumar is the personnel officer in a big fertilizer company at Alwaye. About his experiences with the Holy Mother he tells, "My meeting with the Holy Mother was quite unexpected. It was the day when the devotees had arranged a reception for her in a temple in Ernakulam. The Mother's devotional singing followed by the reception had a great impact on me. I simply gazed at her loving face and keenly listened to the poignant devotional songs which revealed the great truths of life. I could not control my tears. When the singing was over, the Mother was receiving the devotees one by one and I heard some people remarking about her spiritual power. 'She can do all the things which God can do,' some devotees said. While receiving prasadam from the Holy Mother, I told her about my problem which I felt even God could not solve. 'Mother, I am a person suffering from tremendous mental depression. For the last 15 years I have been

suffering from insomnia and cannot sleep even one hour at night. Due to lack of sleep, my face has turned black and dull. I have become very weak as well. Many nights I have sincerely called and prayed to God to give me sleep. All my prayers have ended in vain.' The Holy Mother smiled at me and affectionately smeared some sacred ash on my forehead. She did not even utter a word. I returned home when Mother left the place.

It was midnight when I had my supper after which I felt very tired. It was 12:30, but as sleep was beyond my imagination, I simply hid down on the cot. I opened my eyes when I heard my servants calling me, "Sir, please get up. What kind of sleep is this?" I was shocked when the servant boy told me that it was 9 o'clock in the morning. Fortunately, it was a Sunday and I didn't have to go to work, The boy served me a glass of tea, yet I was unable to keep my eyes open. Effortlessly I again went back to sleep. When I opened my eyes it was 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Getting up from bed, I came to the dining room and saw both my breakfast and lunch sitting there on the table. It was like a dream. It took me a couple of minutes to convince myself of this miracle. From that day until today, I am getting good sleep. It is all due to the Mother's blessings, and her boundless compassion which has given me new vigour and strength.

Soon I visited the Holy Mother at her Ashram. Still I had a lot of family problems. During my first visit to the Ashram I did not tell any of this to the Holy Mother. Anyhow, after seeing the Holy Mother during Devi Bhava, I felt that my difficulties were getting less and less. Three years ago, due to my father-in-law's behaving rudely, I chided him severely. As a protest against this, he pressed his daughter, who was a bank employee, to get a transfer to Trivandrum where he lived. Owing to her father's persistance , my wife was forced to obey him. Thus we were separated. My only son also went with my wife. I was therefore leading a miserable life steeped in the sorrow of separation. My wife's family was trying to cut off our relationship by slowly turning my wife and son against

me. During my second visit I prayed to the Holy Mother to save me. She smilingly consoled me saying, ‘Son, don’t worry. Mother will look after it.’ Though Mother said these words, I wasn’t fully convinced.

The next morning when I was attending my job I felt an unusual mental calmness and delight. I could discharge all my duties sincerely and easily. At noon, I received a telegram containing the following message: ‘Balamurali seriously ill, admitted in hospital...Ammini.’ This was from my wife concerning my son. Even after reading the message I did not feel any anxiety’ or sadness at all. Immediately I left work and went to tell the news to one among the Mother's devotees. When I reached his house another devotee of the Mother was also present. I still remember their words, ‘Gopakumar, don’t worn’, this is just Mother's technique to rejoin both of you. Your son’s illness is just to make you go there.'

I reached Trivandrum at 10 o'clock at night and went straight to the hospital where my son was. When I entered the room where he was lying he suddenly jumped up calling out, ‘Mother, my father has come.' He seemed to be alright. Then my wife briefly told everything which had happened. She said, ‘In the morning his temperature was 105 degrees. All of us were very worried. But later on in the evening the temperature subsided and he became normal.' Then I remembered the words of my friends and I bowed my head at the Holy Mother's feet for showering so much of Grace upon me. I happily spent two days with my wife and son in the hospital and on the third day I returned to Emakulam after getting my son discharged.

The following Sunday as usual, I went to Vallickavu to visit the Holy Mother during Devi Bhava. As it was crowded that day I didn't get a chance to tell her about my meeting with my wife and son. Anyhow, I thought, she knows everything. She would say, ‘Mother knows the problems of her children without being told. She can see their aching heart? As usual, the Holy Mother gave me an incense stick and sacred ash as prasadam and said, ‘Son, when you reach home all your sor-

rows will be removed? That same night I returned home by 1 o'clock. When I entered my bedroom I was surprised and at the same time overwhelmed with joy to see both my wife and son lying fast asleep on my bed. When I saw my wife and son back home who had been separated from me for the last three years, I stood in front of the portrait of the Holy Mother and with joined palms, having lit some incense, I prayed, 'My dear Mother, you can do those things which even God cannot do! '

K.K. Damodaran Nair was a relative of one of the Holy Mother's devotees who was for some months staying in his house in Bombay while employed there. Often Mr. Nair would see his relative sitting before the photo of a lady worshipping and crying and singing bhajans. He would think, 'What a waste of time, to cry to a photo. Who is this so called Mother?' He was very skeptical but never expressed it nor interfered with his relative's worship.

During this period, Mr. Nair returned for a visit to his family house which was about 170 kilometres from the Holy Mother's Ashram. Upon arriving there, he found his 80 year old father working in the garden. He said to him, "Father, you are so old, why should you be doing such strenuous work?" His father replied, "From youth itself I am accustomed to doing hard work. I don't feel any strain." Mr. Nair then visited the house of his relative who was staying with him in Bombay. That man's father was also a staunch devotee of the Holy Mother. The two of them decided to pay a visit to the Holy Mother, Mr. Nair more out of curiosity than anything else.

When they arrived it was Krishna Bhava. Entering the temple, Mr. Nair was astounded to see the shining face and mischievous smile of Krishna. While standing before Krishna during Darshan, he suddenly started dancing. He could not control himself. Krishna then asked him, "Now do you believe?" He felt humiliated and very confused but still

was not ready to fully believe in the Holy Mother. He replied, “Give me an experience and then I will believe.” With a smile on her face. Mother said, “You will get one.”

After returning to Bombay, Mr. Nair was working a night shift one night at around midnight when he fell asleep on his desk. Suddenly at 2 a.m., he felt someone tapping him on the shoulder. Startled, he woke up to see the Holy Mother before him saying “Did you know that your father has died? Look and see.” Suddenly he saw the corpse of his father, lamps lit both at his head and feet and surrounded by crying relatives. The Mother then asked him, “Now do you believe?” Mr. Nair did not know what to think of this experience. How could it have been a dream when he had seen the Mother standing before him with his own eyes? Then again, how could it have been real since only a few days ago he had seen his father as strong and healthy as ever working in the garden?

After completion of his work, he returned home and related the incident to his wife. She told him, “Don’t pay any attention to a silly dream. It must be only a figment of your imagination. Go to sleep.” A couple of hours later a telegram arrived telling, ‘Father expired at 1 a.m. Start immediately.’

After this incident, Mr. Nair gained full faith in the Holy Mother's divinity and became an ardent devotee. He now worships the photo of the Holy Mother like his relative used to do.

Puvampuzha Swami was well known in his village near Quilon. When he heard about the Holy Mother and her Divine Moods as Krishna and Devi, the Swami decided to go and test her spiritual power. After his first visit to the Ashram in 1976, he could not return to meet the Holy Mother for some time due to the death of his mother. During his second visit the Swami thought, ‘If she really has the power of Krishna, let her tell me any one of the doctrines of the Bhagavad Gita. Then only I will believe that she is genuine.’

The Swami entered the temple with the aforesaid sankalpa in his heart when the Holy Mother was in Krishna Bhava. He told her, “Owing to my mother’s death, I have been unable to come here for the last so many days.” The Holy Mother retorted, “That which is not, never comes into being and that which is, never ceases to exist. Forget not this great truth.” Hearing this, the Swami became full of awe and reverence.

This particular saying of the Holy Mother, though not learnt from any of the scriptures, was an exact translation of the 16th verse of Chapter 2 of the Bhagavad Gita. Hearing this, the Swami became fully convinced of the Holy Mother’s greatness and became an ardent devotee of hers.

Radha Bai, who hails from Calicut, was an ardent devotee of Sri Satya Sai Baba. On the 23rd of January, 1985 at night she had a dream. Sri Satya Sai Baba along with another holy woman dressed in pure white clothes appeared to her. Both of them were standing in front of a big house. Pointing to the holy woman, Baba told her “You must go and see this Mother.” Having said this, both of them disappeared without another word. Radha Bai, whose sleep was now disturbed, got up and thought, ‘Where shall I go to meet this Mother? How can I know the place where she is staying?’

In the newspaper the next day, Radha Bai found a write up and picture of a holy woman announcing her arrival in Calicut that very same day. She could easily recognize her face. It was the Mother whom she saw with Baba in the dream. The place and the house where she would stay during her visit was also mentioned in the article. Radha Bai was overwhelmed with joy.

That day itself Radha Bai and her family went to meet the Holy Mother. When they arrived at the house where the Holy Mother was staying, Radha Bai was even more amazed because it was the very same house which she had seen the previous night in her dream. Everyone had darshan of the Holy

Mother. While taking darshan, Radha Bai related the story' of her dream to the Holy Mother. Mother quietly listened and then gently smiled as if to say that she was already aware of the fact! Radha Bai and family returned home feeling highly elevated and blessed.

During the Holy Mother's first visit to Calicut, many devotees had the good fortune to have several inspiring spiritual experiences. Mrs. Kunjukutty Amma, whose Chosen Deity was the Divine Mother, was worshipping Devi as Mookambika (an aspect of the Divine Mother) for the last so many years. Along with her family, she came to see the Holy Mother on the 24th of January, 1985. The following is her experience with the Holy Mother in her own words.

"When I approached the Holy Mother* her penetrating glance fell on me. The very' first look itself made all my hairs stand on end. I even felt that I was losing my body-consciousness. I prostrated to the Mother and supplicated loudly, 'O Mother! Great Enchantress? Mookambika! Protect me, O Mother? Give refuge, give refuge! ' Most affectionately the Holy Mother placed my head on her lap. Slowly raising my head from her lap, the Mother applied sacred ash on my forehead between the eyebrows with her left forefinger. As soon as the Mother touched my forehead, I experienced a terrific jolt all over the body like an electric shock. The next moment, I clearly saw my beloved Deity, Mookambika sitting in the lotus posture adorned with divine ornaments where the Holy Mother was seated. "

Kunjukutty Amma, in a God-intoxicated mood, started dancing and singing. The Holy Mother asked "Child, what do you want?" In the same rapturous mood she replied, "Blessed am I for having touched Thy Lotus Feet. I have seen Parashakti (the Supreme Energy)! O Mother, please do not go away abandoning me."

She continued dancing blissfully and shed tears of joy. Preventing some devotees who tried to carry her out of the room, the Holy Mother said, “Nobody should touch her. She is enjoying bliss.” This blissful mood of Kunjukutty Amma’s continued for half an hour. Having seen her beloved Deity’s beautiful form, she returned home with an overflowing heart.

Kunju Raman, a high school teacher, gives the following account of his experience with the Holy Mother:

“Having been initiated into the Siddha Vidya (a type of spiritual practice) by His Holiness Swami Sivananda Paramahamsa, I have been following the instructions of my guru as best as a householder with his limitations can. I have been doing this for the past twelve years. Fully conscious of the established fact that this Siddha Vidya and scriptural texts like Bhagavad Geeta can take me to my Supreme Goal, I decided not to go to anyone else for guidance.

But in 1985, a lecturer friend and neighbour of mine told me of his experiences at Calicut with a Holy Mother Mata Amritanandamayi. He told me that he had spiritual experiences when Mother merciy touched him. He also showed me a booklet containing Mother's sayings and I also had a chance to listen to Mother's bhajan, 'Manase Nin Svanthamayi' on a cassette.

Even though I was not in good health, I decided that I would take any amount of trouble and get a darshan of this Holy Mother. I discussed this matter with a dose friend and yoga practitioner, Sri K.S.Nair. He also agreed to accompany me. Thus we reached that holy place on 20 October, 1985 at 4 in the evening.

Amma was giving darshan in the hut. When my turn came to meet Amma, she kindly enquired my name and place and said that we would meet again during Bhava Darshan. During the Darshan, Amma forcefully pressed the centre part of my forehead and asked me to sit by her side and meditate.

The next day, while Sri Nair and myself were standing in front of the shrine totally at a loss at not being able to find a solitary place to meditate, Amma suddenly appeared in front of us. Saying, “Come, sons’” Amma touched us and took us to the meditation hall on the southern side where some of the brahmacharis were meditating. Amma made us sit down and started meditating with us. This incident really surprised us. Amma, who was somewhere in the Ashram, suddenly appeared in front of us knowing our desire to meditate. This incident revealed her high state to us. We believe that it is this experience of ours that later was responsible for creating a group of devotees in Ambalapara.

In November and December, my nose was bleeding from time to time. Even after consulting a doctor and undergoing treatment continuously, the bleeding continued to trouble me. We came to know that Amma was being received at Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Pallapuram on the 4th of January and so my friend Sri Narayanan Nair and myself decided to go and have her darshan as well as to finalise the details for the programme to be held in Ambalapara on the 17th.

It was only after having Mother's darshan that we realised that wc had forgotten to mention about my bleeding nose problem. Taking all the medicines, I threw them out saying “If it is the Will of Amma, the disease will leave me of its own accord.” Strange but true, I saw the last of that disease and have not had that problem to this day.

When Amma visited Ambalapara in 1986, we had the good fortune of welcoming Amma to our humble abode. During the pada pooja (worship offered to Amma’s holy feet) the imprint of the holy feet could be clearly seen on the plate in which they were washed. That plate which bears the imprint of Amma’s holy feet is kept nowadays in our meditation room and worshipped by us as well as by Amma’s devotees. This imprint can still be seen clearly even today.”

Seshan, a devotee hailing from Madras, was an electrical engineer. After retirement he dedicated his whole time to organising spiritual discourses and serving sannyasins. Even though he did quite a lot of spiritual practice, no progress was made until he met the Holy Mother in 1984. After his first meeting with the Holy Mother, Seshan several times prayed to her to initiate him with a mantra. For some reason or other. Mother did not pay much attention to his request. Nevertheless, Seshan persisted in his request. It was during this period that the Holy Mother visited Tiruvannamalai, the abode of Ramana Maharshi. Seshan with his family came to visit the Mother there. This time, when Seshan expressed his cherished desire to the Mother, immediately she told him that she would initiate him during his next visit to Vallickavu.

As the Holy Mother had promised, Seshan received his initiation when he next visited the Ashram. Though a Darshan day, it was not very crowded. At eleven in the night, just before the end of Devi Bhava, Seshan was initiated by the Holy Mother. Before leaving the temple she instructed the devotees, “This son should neither be touched nor be called by anyone.”

Soon after the initiation, Seshan became immersed in meditation. After three hours had passed, he was still sitting in the temple unmoved. Adhering to the Holy Mother’s instructions, two of the residents of the Ashram guarded the temple doors to avoid any possible disturbances. Just after two in the morning, Seshan opened his eyes and looked around perplexed. He asked one of the residents, “Where is everybody? Where is Mother? Why is there no bhajan? I have meditated only for a few minutes, but what has happened?” The resident exclaimed, “A few minutes! Three hours have passed. Mother initiated you at 11 o’clock and now it is 2 o’clock. The Bhava Darshan finished a long time ago.”

Hearing the words of the resident, Seshan’s amazement and happiness knew no bounds. “The Mother’s Grace!” he exclaimed. The resident’s curiosity was aroused and he asked, “If you don’t mind, we are interested to know what experi-

ence you had. As spiritual practitioners, it would be an inspiration for us."

Seshan responded with delight, "How can I express it through words? After imparting the mantra, the Holy Mother touched the spot between my eyebrows with her forefinger. The impact of that touch was wonderful. I felt something like a very strong electric shock permeating my whole body. The temple and the entire world revolved at high speed until it disappeared from my sight. After this, what I could feel was only bliss. You told me that I sat for three hours in meditation, but it felt as if only three minutes had passed. What a wonder, there was neither space nor time!"

After hearing this story, the resident's curiosity only increased. With a little bit of hesitation he asked, "May I know the mantra which was given to you? If you think it proper, please do tell me. I am inspired to ask this because from your explanation it is clear that you were transported to a formless state soon after the initiation."

Seshan replied, "A sadhak is not supposed to reveal these things to anybody else. It should be kept as a secret. But I can tell you this much. I am a Vedantin, a worshipper of the formless Supreme Consciousness. For many years now I have been chanting a mantra, but without having had any experience. The Holy Mother initiated me with the same mantra. Not only did she give the mantra to me, but she blessed me by bestowing the experience of it as well."

Mr. P.O. Narayan Nambiar who hailed from Calicut, one of the three major cities in Kerala, narrates his experience as follows: "Bring a devotee of Lord Krishna from a very young age, I always used to chant His Divine Names and sing devotional songs about Him. At the age of 17, I was initiated by the disciple of a Great Soul, Sivananda Paramahamsa. From that time onwards, besides singing the glories of the Lord I also used to practice meditation.

"It was in the year 1960 when the following incident occured. One night after my usual singing and meditation, I went to bed. At 3.30 a.m. I had a dream in which I saw a big hall with a courtyard in front of it. In the courtyard there were different kinds of colourful plants, both in flower pots and on the ground. There I saw two figures; one was that of a holy man wearing a bright orange gown, with a mop of tight curly hair. The other was a holy woman dressed in white who made a sign with her right hand beckoning me to follow them. The holy man neither looked at me nor gestured. Though only a dream, I was firmly convinced that there must be some significance behind it. The dream and the Great Souls who I saw in it have remained ever vivid in my mind.

"It was not until two years later, when he was first becoming known in our area, that I discovered that the holy man was Sri Satya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi. Another twenty years passed before on the 26th of January', 1985 I realized that the holy woman whom I saw in the dream was Mata Amritanandamayi. That is when I saw her for the first time in the home of a devotee in Calicut.

"When I met the Mother, I requested her with all humility, I have been practicing meditation since the age of 17. But until now I have not experienced the state of samadhi. Please bless me by bestowing that boon on me? The Mother looked in my eyes and said, 'Son, intensify your sadhana and proceed?

"Having received her blessings while I was standing outside the house, I saw the Holy Mother with some of her disciples getting ready to depart in order ^o participate in a reception followed by a consecration ceremony in a temple. I stood a short distance away from the entrance gate thinking to depart only after the car carrying the Holy Mother had left the compound. She was about to step into the car when suddenly the Holy Mother noticed me standing a short distance away. Immediately she withdrew her step and walked towards me. Joining my palms, I bowed down to her. She touched the back of my palms with her finger and said, 'Son, Mother has agreed

to go, but she will return soon.' That touch of the Holy Mother was like a tremendous electric shock. It shook me and my whole body was jolted from head to toe. My eyes automatically closed and filled with tears. Four or five seconds passed, and when I opened my eyes again Mother had already entered the car and was departing. I stood transfixed on the same spot until Mother returned. The touch of the Holy Mother had a great impact on me. My spiritual practices have strengthened and my concentration has increased. Above all, my craving for worldly pleasures which existed until the previous day mysteriously and effortlessly disappeared from my mind. This state of mind continues even today.

"In April 1985, while attending a 7 day spiritual camp at the Holy Mother's Ashram I asked her, 'Mother, I have read in some spiritual texts that if one could find the Spiritual Master of his previous birth then he could quickly gain spiritual progress. Mother, were you my Guru in a previous birth?' Then the Holy Mother smilingly said, 'Yes, son.' I humbly requested, 'Mother, if so, kindly initiate me.' The Holy Mother affectionately replied, 'During your next visit Mother will initiate you.'

As told by the Holy Mother, during my next visit to the Ashram on the 12th of May 1985, she initiated me at the end of Devi Bhava. Having been initiated, the Holy Mother put a trident in my hands and instructed me to meditate as much time as I wanted to. From the moment she handed over the trident to me until I placed it back in its former place, the trident strongly vibrated as if there was electricity in it. In order to convince myself that it was not a mere hallucination of my mind, several times I released one hand and held it with the other. But the vibration did not stop; it was real. Even my hands shook in consonance with the vibrations of the trident. This continued for one and a half hours until I returned the trident to its original place. Now I was convinced that the Holy Mother was a Perfect Master and that she could transmit her spiritual energy' even to an inert object. These experiences and many others strengthened my faith in the Holy Mother and now I have dedicated my whole life at her Lotus Feet.

Experiences of Spiritual Aspirants

Unnikrishna was the first person who was fortunate enough to meet Mother and stay with her for a long time. He did not continue his schooling after the sixth grade. In him we see a wonderful example of the Mother's kindness and grace. If the Guru's Grace is there, even an illiterate layman can become an immortal poet. Unnikrishna's life is the best testimony to this.

After completing his brief schooling, the young Unni wandered freely engaging himself in a variety of activities. In 1976, when he was twenty years old, he heard about the Holy Mother and came to see her. He felt great faith and devotion for Amma from that very first meeting. Thereafter, he frequently visited her and sought her instructions. A year passed in this way when one day. Mother asked him to stay with her in order to perform the daily worship in the temple. She instructed him to chant the Lalita Sahasranama (The Thousand Names of the Divine Mother) every day.

From that point onwards there came a complete revolution in his life. The mere presence of the Holy Mother inspired him with a strong desire to realize the Truth. His days were filled with the practice of austere penance, formal worship, conversations with Amma, reading of scriptures, and other spiritual activities. As a result of this disciplined way of life, he gradually realised that the glorious Mother of the Bhava Darshan, and the everyday Mother in her more usual moods were in fact one and the same, two facets or manifestations of the same infinite Divine Power played Out for the good of the world. This insight greatly stimulated his desire to perform sadhana (spiritual practices) and he surrendered himself fully at Mother's feet regarding her as his sole support in life. As time passed, his spiritual disciplines took an even more rigorous turn; he came to eat, sleep and speak less. On occasion, he fasted for several weeks at a stretch. He used to sleep on the bare ground without so much as a blanket to cover himself during the winter and the rainy season. When he went

on pilgrimage, as he occasionally did, he travelled on foot the whole way without recourse to any other form of conveyance.

One day, with tears in his eyes, he asked Mother with overflowing emotion, “Who is my real Mother?” Regarding him with great tenderness, the Holy Mother took his head on her lap and replied, "My child, you are my son and I am your mother.” Unnikrishna was overwhelmed by an inexpressible bliss welling up from within. As he silently gazed at Mother’s radiant face, he shed tears of joy.

By the infinite Grace of the Mother, Unnikrishna has become a prolific poet whose works are pregnant with deep philosophical import and devotional sweetness. Once, when his parents had sent some relatives to bring him back home, he replied with the following poignant verse:

Having left my home long ago
If I were to now lead a worldly life would I gain
Peace of mind thereby?
What profit has there been in such an existence
Even from time immemorial?

When I am struggling to free myself
From the utter folly of the world,
Why do you pave a fool's path straight
To the servitude of the beggar?
Can I ever agree to such a fate?

Unni describes his first meeting with Mother in the following evocative way:

In a distant temple a glowing flame burnt
Without getting extinguished.
The Mother with infinite compassion was
Seated there as a guiding light far those
Wandering destitute in the darkness.
One day while I wandered there

That embodiment of mercy called me aside.
Opening the inner sanctum
She dabbed sandalwood paste on my forehead.

Melodiously singing the exalted praises of the
Lord, She made a place for me on Her soft and
Sacred arm. Coming near, a wondrous divine
Dream whispered this truth in my ear:

"What need is there for tears? Don't you know
That you have come near the Mother of the
Universe?" With a sigh I awoke, Her Lotus Face
Indelibly impressed on my consciousness.

On one occasion, due to some inner conflict, Unnikrishna fasted for several weeks. When the Holy Mother came to know about it, she also stopped eating and drinking. Unni, unaware of her fasting, continued his vow. After a couple of days, while doing his daily worship, the Holy Mother's father scolded him severely for not taking food and thereby making Mother starve. Soon after the worship was over, he came to the doorway of Mother's hut with a heavy heart and eyes filled with tears. Calling him to her side, she caressed him with great love and looking at his shivering body said, "Unni, my son, if there is some inner agitation you should come and tell Mother about it. Don't torture your body like this. To do tapas, the body is needed. Eat at least for the sustenance of the body." Saying this, she asked for a plate of rice and fed Unni with her own hands, herself eating out of the same plate.

A few months after his settling in the Ashram, Unni, whose nature was that of a wandering mendicant, decided to go away. Without informing anyone, he made ready for his journey. It was a Darshan night and as he was about to depart, a man suddenly came sent by the Mother and said, "Mother says that even though you are getting ready to go, you should not depart now." Unable to disobey the Holy Mother, he cancelled his journey. Once more he tried to go at a later date but the same incident repeated itself. Finally, he did actually

leave the place but had to return after two days. He thereby became convinced that without Mother's knowledge and blessings, nothing can be done.

Mother once told that "Unni's songs spring from his meditation." What greater recognition could there be beyond this? The following is a translation of two of his songs:

I have wandered in distant lands carrying a Heavy burden of sorrow. At last, coming near You I have surrendered myself at Your Lotus Feet. O Mother, won't You kindly wash away my Endless afflictions and tears with the waters of Your Love?

Consider not this poor one as a sinner as no one Else is there in tins world as my stay and support. O Embodiment of Compassion, please carress Me with the Moonlight of Your beautiful eyes.

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O Mother, throwing away this heavy burden of Thoughts let me sit near You and merge in Meditation. O the One who is described in the Vedas And Vedanta!

O the Mother of all the Gods and Goddesses! Won't You fulfill this wish springing from my Soul to gain the Supreme Self? O Mother, when Will that time come when I will renounce all Taste for pleasure-seeking and become one with Your Holy Feet?

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Born and brought up in an orthodox brahmana family, Chandru (Adhyatma Chaitanya) had immense faith in the Divine Mother even from his childhood. He would confide all

of his problems to Her while visiting a small Devi temple near his house. Having failed in his exams for the Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1975, he left his home for Madras in great disappointment and stayed with his uncle there. One day, his uncle accosted him telling him, “Don’t spend your life simply sitting idle. Try to get a job.” Taking his advice to heart, Chandru searched for employment and finally got a job working in a fishing boat. From then onwards, he began to experience both the ups and downs of life.

At this time, Chandru became closely associated with a Hindu monk who was engaged in giving classes in Hindu scriptures. Thenceforth, he dedicated most of his time to spiritual activities like scriptural study, devotional singing, etc., and simultaneously attended to his official work in the fishing boat.

One day, Chandru suddenly felt that he must go back to his home in Kerala. Within a couple of days, he left Madras and reached Alleppey but found it extremely difficult to live with his relatives who insisted that he appear again for the B.A. exams. It was at this time that he came to hear about the Holy Mother and accompanied by a friend, he reached her Ashram one night around 10 o’clock in 1978.

When Chandru saw the Holy Mother emerge from the temple transformed into the Universal Mother during the Devi Bhava, he felt that he was standing before the Divine Mother Kali of Dakshinesvar. After her ecstatic and blissful dance, the Holy Mother seated herself inside the temple and Chandru entered to have her Darshan. When the Holy Mother pressed her forefinger between Chandru’s eyebrows, he had the vision of Kali Mata as seen in the Bhavatarini Temple in Calcutta. Mother asked him to sit and meditate and he soon became immersed in meditation for more than two hours. While witnessing the Holy Mother sucking the blood and pus out of the stinking wounds of Dattan the leper, Chandru’s heart overflowed with love and reverance for her. This was proof enough for him to understand and believe in the Holy Mother’s incomparable greatness. At that moment

he decided to renounce worldly life and embrace the life of spirituality.

The next morning while taking leave of the Holy Mother, Chandru asked, “May, I go. Mother?” replying which she told, “Son, nobody can go anywhere. Where to go?” Unable to understand the Vedantic import of her words, Chandru left the Ashram. Soon after his departure, the Holy Mother turned to a close devotee and said, “He is my son. He will return immediately.”

In the meantime, Chandru, who had reached the other side of the river, suddenly had an intense urge to go back to the Ashram and so he returned on the very same ferry' that had taken him across. Mother, with a loving smile said, “Consider the whole world as your Guru. Don’t think that Mother is this body. The body is inert. Don’t you see how an infected wound on the body begins to stink? How can the body be one’s real Self? You have studied so many things but nothing has entered into your heart. You have no devotion.”

Hearing Mother’s words, Chandru wept like a child. He left the Ashram as an utterly changed person endowed with a resolute mind bent on following the spiritual path. With his mind fixed on the Holy Mother’s divine form, he reached home and relinquishing his luxurious ways of living, he went without food and sleep for three day’s and nights.

Telling his parents that he was going to observe a special vow in the presence of the Holy Mother in order to remove the influence of evil forces on himself, Chandru came for a three days stay at the Ashram. When the Holy Mother saw him, she told him, “You have come here after telling a lie to your parents. It is alright. It is to know the Truth that you have done so.” Soon after, Chandra's parents also came to visit the Holy Mother and became her ardent devotees.

Chandru had an intense desire to become a monk. The Holy Mother told him, “If your mother in Alleppey agrees, then only will I accept you.” Before coming to the Mother, Chandru had been very hot tempered by nature. His sudden and surprising change was something unbelievable to his

parents and other relatives. They were very' happy about it, especially his mother. Being a pious and devoted lady, she readily consented to Chandru's desire to become a monk and offered her son at the Holy Mother's Feet. On that auspicious occasion, Chandru's mother asked the Holy Mother, "O Mother, how did you tame this Chandru who was so hot-tempered?" The Mother smilingly replied, "Don't you know that he has come to Bhadrakali (the fierce aspect of the Divine Mother)?"

Because of the lack of facilities to stay at Vallickavu, Chandru requested Mother to send him somewhere to do his spiritual practices. The Holy Mother thereupon sent him to Tiruvannamalai (where resided the famous sage Sri Ramana Maharshi) in order to perform 41 days of intense spiritual discipline. Chandru reached Tiruvannamalai on 11 October, 1979 where he met Nealu, Gayatri, Ganga (Sarvatma Chaitanya) and Madhu (Prematma Chaitanya). Later on, all of them became Mother's disciples and settled in her Ashram as permanent residents.

During his stay in Tiruvannamalai, Chandru wrote the following song:

O Mother who dwells in the heart
O Mother who is the embodiment of love,
I knew nothing but to utter Your Divine Names.
O Mother of the Universe, bless me
To transmit Your divine message. I want not
Worldly enjoyments but only pure devotion to You.

How many births have passed in vain while I
Remained unable to merge in Your Sacred Feet.
O Mother, only because of Your immense
Compassion I have come to You now in this birth.
O Ocean of Pure Love, I offer my self to You.
I want nothing, not even life itself, without
Knowing You.

Carrying these burdens, I have passed Through many births without knowing ou. In this birth, having come to Tote, I have Given all burdens to You. O Mother, I cannot See anything permanent except for Your Infinite Power. Merging In that Stream of Consciousness, let the **I'** *in me disappear.*

Though Mother told me that I and She are not Separate, at present I have not the power to see us As one and so wish to remain before Her as Her Child. Mother always raises Her children with Great care and love and by the mere touch of Her Sacred hands all of my sins will be washed away.

O Mother, why are You so late?
Is not this child Your own?

Thinking that I am Your own child,

I am spending my days Counting the moments.

O Mother, what shall I do to merge in You?

Won't You please show me the correct path?

O Mother, I am nothing. You are everything,

you Are everything...

After returning from Tiruvannamalai, Chandru spent 2 months in the holy Presence of the Mother during which time he underwent strict and severe discipline under her guidance. After 2 months, in obedience to Mother's instructions, he went in the middle of March, 1980 to Sandheepany Sadha- nalaya in Bombay, a part of the Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, in order to study the Hindu scriptures. The day before his departure Mother told him, "Have faith in your Guru, God and the Scriptures. The intention of your studies should be for the good of the world. Don't listen to those who abuse your Guru."

During his stay in Bombay, Chandru had several visions of **Mother** scolding him for not doing his spiritual practices properly. Thus, the Holy Mother, though physically thou-

discipline Chandru studying in Bombay. She would send letters to him containing spiritual instructions and philosophical statements presented in her own simple and lucid style. These letters were of great help to him in moulding his character and integrating his personality.

Having completed his studies, Chandru, now known as Adhyatma Chaitanya, returned from Bombay to Vallickavu in March, 1983 and worked for the Chinmaya Mission Trust for a year. At the same time, the Holy Mother asked him to give classes for the residents of the Ashram. On 24 December, 1984 he resigned from the activities of the Chinmaya Mission and dedicated all his time to serving the Holy Mother and spreading her divine message.

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Balu (Amritatma Chaitanya) narrates the following experiences of Mother's Grace:

"When my B.A. final examinations were over, I heard about a girl endowed with supernatural powers who would appear as Devi and Krishna. Though my faith in the existence of God was deep-rooted, I was not much interested in seeing her. Some of my relatives and friends who had already visited her place spoke very highly of her and continued to press me to visit her Ashram. Finally, one evening with a skeptical mind I came to the Ashram accompanied by my uncle. It was already dark and as I approached the Ashram the strains of a heart-capturing devotional song reverberated in my cars. It arrested my attention. I entered into the Ashram premises where there was a small shrine in which I saw a girl in white clothes singing songs laden with love and devotion. Listening to the song, one could see that her heart was overflowing in divine bliss and love. The vibrations created by the song pierced my heart and evoked my tender feelings.

"When my turn came, I entered into the shrine room where she was seated on a pcetham or stool. I prostrated before her and when I got up, she took hold of my hand and looked into

my eyes. Her eyes were beaming like the full moon. That look penetrated through me, that smile bound me and made me motionless. Compassion breaking all its limits manifested on her face. Slowly she put my head on her shoulder and softly but emphatically said, 'Child, I am your mother and you are my child.' That sweet voice entered deep into my heart and I became enraptured in an inexplicable joy. This is what I had been searching for. I burst into tears. Love in all its purity—Motherhood on a universal scale had assumed a form. Thrilled by this first experience, I sat near Mother the whole night.

"When I reached home the next day, I realised the great change which had taken place in me. I became totally indifferent to all my usual activities. My desire to see her again intensified. All my thoughts were fixed on her. That night I was unable to sleep. Whenever I tried to close my eyes, the Mother appeared in front of me. Next day I again returned to the Ashram. After the second meeting with Mother, my desire to break off the fetters of worldliness intensified. Thinking of the Mother, I became like one who is crazy. I forgot to eat, sleep and to take bath. I left off my fancy way of dressing and combing the hair. My parents and other family members noticed the change in me and becoming worried, forbid me from going to Vallickavu.

"The next day after participating in the bhajan, I entered the shrine with this resolve: 'Mother, if I am your child, please accept me.' Placing my head on her shoulder. Mother lovingly said, 'Son, when Mother heard you singing, she understood that this voice is meant to merge in God. Then itself Mother came near you and made you one with her. You are my very own.'

"One night when I was half asleep, I smelt a peculiar fragrance pervading the whole room. I opened my eyes and found that the fragrance was really there, not just a dream or imagination. Suddenly, I felt someone's hands stroking my forehead. I looked up and to my surprise I saw Mother standing at the end of the cot where my head was. I couldn't believe

my eyes. She smiled at me and said, ‘My son. Mother is always with you, don't worry.' Saying this, she disappeared.

Next morning I rushed to Vallickavu hut Mother was not there. She came only at 4 o'clock in the evening. Without uttering a word, she ran to the house and came out with a plate of rice and fed me like a mother would her son. While feeding me she said, ‘Last night. Mother came near you? Overwhelmed with happiness, I cried like a small child. In fact, I had not eaten anything that day.

“Having been initiated by Mother with a mantra, I was unable to stay at home. My yearning to live in her presence and to seek her instructions increased day by day. Disregarding the obstacles created by my relatives, I left my home and joined the Ashram.

“Two years later, whilst sitting in a devotee’s house she said to me, ‘My son Balu, you must get a Master’s degree in philosophy.' I had previously told Mother one day that I was not going to continue my studies but just wanted to become crazy thinking about her. Now, two years later she was asking me to study again. From my experience I knew that without a purpose she would not say or do anything and so I joined the course. But now arose a real problem; who would teach me? I would have to study eight papers, four on Indian philosophy with which I was somewhat familiar and four on Western philosophy which was an entirely new subject. The need of an instructor was imperative. I asked Mother about it.

‘Don’t worry about it. Someone will come here and instruct you. Patiently wait and see' she told. But I was restless and frequently disturbed her asking the same question. After one week, a devotee directed me to a man who was a philosophy professor. I went to his place and explained the situation He was ready to teach me but refused to come to the Ashram. I tried to make him understand about my difficulty in leaving the Ashram to study. At last he agreed to visit the Ashram but said, ‘I cannot stay there or give classes for you there. If you want to study you must come here. Otherwise, drop the matter now itself.' I thought that since I had no other choice let him atleast come to the Ashram and see Mother.

"The following Thursday I went and fetched him from his home. When we reached the Ashram, I requested him to come and see Mother but he refused. When Mother sat for her usual singing before the Bhava Darshan, he was watching from a distance. Even after the Darshan started he was closely observing from a distance. I approached him and told him that if he liked he could go inside the temple and have Mother's Darshan. 'No, I have never prostrated to anyone before. I don't like to do that,' he replied. I left him alone and sat for singing. After a couple of minutes I saw him rushing into the temple and heard a loud cry. He had fallen flat in front of Mother and was weeping like a small child. An hour or two passed. Coming out of the shnne, he called me aside and said, €Shc is a Great Soul par excellence. Every week I will come here and teach you.' Thus, Mother herself arranged a teacher for me.

"Referring to different books, the professor dictated a lot of notes to me but didn't explain anything. Unfortunately, due to certain other reasons we were not able to continue the studies regularly and Western philosophy still remained as an unknown subject to me. Only three more months were left before the examinations. The professor dictated to me some more notes and gave a summary' of the whole thing. As I was involved in different activities of the Ashram and would frequently be travelling with Mother, I could not attend to my studies. Now there was only one month left for the exams. Mother asked me to write all the eight papers in one sirring. I was really worried as to how I would be able to write both the first and final year papers together. I dedicated everything at Mother's feet and began reading. At last it was the day before my departure to Tirupati (a town in Andhra Pradesh some 700 miles from the Ashram) where I had registered my name in the University as a student of philosophy.

"At noon I was about to pack my things. Suddenly, I heard Mother calling me from her room. I ran to her room and saw her packing some things in a bag. She put the last item into it and dosed it. Another big bag was there on her table. With

great affection she came near me and said, “Son, I have packed everything for your journey.” Pointing to the bag placed on the table she said, “That bag contains dhotis, shirts, towels, two blankets and other clothes and in this one there is coconut oil, soap, a mirror, comb, something to make a hot drink and other useful things. I have packed all these things so as to save time for your studies.” I was unable to utter even a word. I simply looked at her loving face. My heart was overflowing with joy. My eyes filled with tears and I broke down weeping.

“After coming to her, this was the first time that I was going to be away from her and that too, for one month. My heart was very’ heavy. In the train I sat in a comer to hide my tears. All the passengers were happily engaged in chatting but my mind was full of sorrow because of my separation from Mother. All the way I thought of her. The following morning I reached Tirupati. My days were filled with excruciating pangs of separation. I felt like a fish taken out of water. I tried to concentrate on my studies but failed. Each minute moved like a snail. I was even unable to look at Mother’s picture. Each object brought from the Ashram reminded me of Mother and her gracious form. I forgot to eat and sleep. Each day was like a year for me. Now and then I collapsed. Unable to bear the pain of separation, I burst into tears. By the time the final year exams began I somehow managed to write the papers. There was nobody to share my sorrow with. At that time, I received a letter from Mother. Several times I read and reread it. Soaked by my teardrops, the letter turned wet. The following is the translation of Mother's letter to me:

Darling Son,

Your Mother is always with you. Son, Mother doesn’t feel that you are away from her. My child. Mother can see your yearning heart. Mother can hear your cries. My son, this world is so beautiful. The flowers, the vast ocean, the chirping birds, the expanse of the sky, trees, bushes, forests, mountains and valleys are all here. God made this earth beautiful. See Him in everything. Love Him through all beings. Cut

open the bund separating you from God. Let your mind incessantly flow towards Him. Son, nothing is bad in this world. Everything is good. See the good and virtuous pan. Let your mental flower blossom and spread its fragrance all around...

"That night I was sitting outside the room. The trees and plants danced in the cool gentle breeze. The sky was full of glittering stars and the silver rays of the moon lighted the earth with all its splendour. I thought, 'This breeze may go to my Mother and it may be fortunate enough to carrying my Mother's body. Yes, no doubt this is carrying my dear Mother's divine fragrance. If I had a pair of wings I would fly to my Mother. ' The following piece of poetry was written by me on the same night.

O stars, can't you please come down?
Mother is here to sing a lullaby to you.
She is the stream oj never-ending love and
She is the shade-giving tree for seeking minds.
O cool gentle breeze who comes slowly humming
Silent songs in the night, what did you whisper so
Sweetly in my ears?
Is it the sweet stories of my Mother?

The sun and moon slowly rise and set
Up in the blue sky everyday.
Don't you have the desire to see my
Mother who has given this divine splendour to
You? Trees and creepers grow in abundance in
The silent lonely valleys and hill sides.
As if to console me their tender branches dance
In The wind.

"I was in a completely different mood. I roamed about in the room like one gone mad. Somehow I controlled myself and decided to leave the next day itself. One more subject remained among the final year papers. I decided not to appear for the first year exams which were to start after four days. I

thought, 'Mother has asked me to attend all the exams but now I am going to act against her advice?

"Finally I decided to seek Mother's permission in a peculiar way. I took three pieces of paper of equal measurements. On the first piece I wrote, 'Son, you come back'. On the seeond one I wrote 'You write all the papers and come' and on the third I wrote 'As my son likes'. I rolled all the three papers in the same manner, shook them and took Mother's picture from the bag and placed it in a comer. With this prayer I humbly offered the papers in front of her, 'O Mother, I am going to take one of these papers from here. Let me know your will whatever it be?

"With closed eyes, I took one of the papers with trembling hands. I opened it. Alas' it was the one on which I had written 'You write all the papers and come; Not satisfied with the first attempt, I tried my lot again with three more pieces of paper but again I picked up the same note. My mind however, was yearning to see Mother and so I finally decided to leave the place the next day itself.

"The next day, after attending the last subject of the final year exams, I rushed to the room and packed all my things and was about to leave the room. Suddenly, I noticed certain things lying in the corner of the room. They were some useless newspapers which I had used as a wrapper to bring things from the Ashram and also a broken piece of a soap box. I thought, 'How intense was my pain when I was separated from Mother. These things also may have the same pain as myself. If I leave them here it will be a sin? I carefully packed all those things and put them in my bag.

"The following day I reached the Ashram. On the way to Mother's room I saw my brother Venu. In an astonished tone he said, 'Yesterday night Mother told me that you are getting very restless and that you will come today? I entered Mother's room and fell at her feet crying. Mother lifted me up and consoled me saying 'Son, I know your heart, this love is good but try to acquire more mental strength. A sadhak should be soft like a flower and hard like a diamond. You must go and write

the other papers. Even if you fail. Mother won't mind. Tomorrow itself you go and come back when the exams are over.'

"The next morning I went back to Tirupati. After one week when the last exam was over, I returned to the Ashram. I was not satisfied with my answers and even feared that I may fail. Mother calmly said, 'Forget about it. Don't doubt. You will succeed.' When the results were published I was surprised to see that I had passed with a high second class.

"To be in the presence of the Holy Mother itself is a tapas. There is always something new and fresh in it. Every moment reveals a novel experience enlightening the devotee in a different realm of spirituality, evolving him from one plane to the other. In the beginning stages of my spiritual life I sometimes used to feel that I had understood the Holy Mother. Later I realised that I had understood nothing about Mother at all."

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Venu is the brother of Balu (Amritatma Chaitanya.) Both of them were infants when their mother died. After her death, Balu grew up in his father's house and Venn was raised by his aunt (mother's eldest sister) Saraswathy Amma. The family atmosphere was quite religious and spiritual. Venu was the pet of the family and never experienced the absence of a mother's love and affection. After completing his schooling at the age of 15, Venu came to his father to continue his college education. Though he manifested an inclination towards spirituality at an early age, during his college years all such qualities faded into the background and he led a worldly life. Even then, whenever he would see a devotional movie or a monk in ochre robes he would feel again the stirrings of his dormant spiritual impulse.

By this time, his brother Balu had already met the Holy Mother and had dedicated himself to spirituality'. Though Balu told his brother about the Holy Mother several times, Venu paid little attention to it. Moreover, he openly abused

the Holy Mother and asserted, “I won’t come near that fisher-girl.” However, even before seeing Venu, Amma predicted to Balu, “Your brother also is my son. He will come here.’[1] Hearing this, Balu became a bit worried because there was already an uproar in his family over his own decision to leave home and the worldly life. What would happen if Venu also followed in his footsteps? However, the Divine Will is supreme and beyond the realm of ordinary mortal vision and calculation. What was fated would inevitably come to pass.

While Venu was studying for the final year of his Bachelor of Science degree, the Holy Mother visited his aunt’s house one day. When Venu returned home from college, the Holy Mother was standing on the verandah of the house. Even without looking at her, Venu strode past Mother into his room where Sreekumar, Pai and some other residents of Mother’s Ashram were seated.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the Holy Mother approached Venu and holding his hands like a loving mother said, “Aren’t you my son Balu’s brother? Mother has been yearning to see you.” Venu’s heart melted and he realized in a flash that Mother was not an ordinary personality, but rather a fountain of motherly love and tenderness. Venu felt attracted to her as a piece of iron to a magnet. In the afternoon when Amma fed everyone, Venu also got a ball of rice. It was an unforgettable experience for him. He felt enchanted to see her infinite love, equal vision and childlike innocence. Her face was radiant and overflowing with spiritual splendour. Her lucid way of explaining spiritual mysteries, ecstatic and bewitching bhajans, and above all her absolute humility impressed him deeply. Within a short period of time, Venu found himself being drawn to the Mother. Even though the Holy Mother was talking to others it seemed to Venu that she was actually responding to the doubts which had cropped up in his mind.

The first meeting with the Holy Mother left a deep impression in Vcnu’s mind and all the prejudices which he had about the Holy Mother and spiritual life vanished. Day by day his

wish to see the Mother increased. At last in February, 1980 he came to Vallickavu. When Venu saw the Mother he burst into tears. The Holy Mother caught hold of him and made him sit near her. That night, when Venu went inside the temple during Krishna Bhava, he felt that he was standing before Lord Sri Krishna Himself. His mind overflowed with joy and he could neither cry nor laugh. He prayed to Mother to bless him by bestowing pure devotion and knowledge on him. Mother said, ᵘSon, you will get what you are seeking?' Mother gave him a mantra written on a piece of paper and a garland of tulasi leaves.

After Venu's first meeting with the Holy Mother, he lost all desire to continue his studies, his only wish being to lead a spiritual life. Due to the Mother's insistance, Venu prepared for his college examinations which were one month away. Professors and students were amazed to see Venu coming to the college with a completely shaven head and sacred ashes on his forehead. They thought that he had gone mad. His mind was entirely immersed in the thought of the Holy Mother. So much so, he inadvertantly prepared for the following day's examination and not for that day's paper. Somehow or other he did complete the exams and came to stay with the Holy Mother in September, 1980.

One day in connection with a festival, sweet pudding was prepared in the Ashram. It was customary to offer it to God before distributing it among the devotees. Venu took a tumbler full and placed it in the small shrine before the temple. Finding nothing else to cover the tumbler with and looking around to make sure that Mother was not nearby, he plucked a tender leaf off a small plant growing near the shrine. Mother saw it and from a distance called aloud 'Hey Venu!' Hearing Mother's voice, he tried to hide the tender leaf but in his haste he tipped the tumbler spilling over the entire contents upon the sand. By this time, Venu was completely undone and, hoping to escape further notice, he scooped the pudding from the sand and stuffed it back into the tumbler even though knowing that it was wrong to put it back in the shrine.

Mother, who was observing the whole scene from a distance, came near him and said in a serious tone, “Son, even a dog won’t eat this. What to say of human beings? Then how could you offer it to God? Son, will even you eat it? No! This is a real sin. God will accept anything that is offered to Him with pure love and devotion not caring about what it is. He only sees what is the attitude behind the offering. If you were really ignorant about your deed, I would not have minded it, but with full knowledge that what you were doing was wrong, you proceeded to do it. Not only that. You have committed another mistake by plucking a tender leaf from that small plant. How merciless you are! I can see the small plant crying out of pain. If someone pinches you, how much pain you will suffer. Son, even though you don’t feel its pain. Mother does.”

Venu realised his mistake and repented. He prayed for forgiveness. Mother said, “Son, whatever errors you commit, I take to be due to some fault of my own. Mother is not at all angry’ with you but in order to lead you on the path to Perfection she has to pretend to be so.”

Venu says, “Nothing can be concealed from the Holy Mother. She knows everything. About 5 years ago I had an experience which exemplifies this fact. One night during supper while everyone was drinking kanji (rice gruel), I suddenly had a strong desire to have some mango pickles as a side dish. I had seen them in the Ashram kitchen earlier in the day but, as they were meant for the labourers and visiting devotees, we residents were not supposed to take them. Also, Mother had told us that as spiritual aspirants, we should not eat things which were very spicy, sour, salty or sweet. She would often come into the kitchen unannounced to see whether her instructions were being followed. Although I was fully aware of this, the desire for the pickles got the better of me.

Without making any noise, I entered the kitchen and stealthily stole two big slices of mango pickle and was about to leave when suddenly I heard Mother’s voice, ‘Venu, what is in

your hand?' I was shocked and to avoid being caught red-handed, I threw the mango slices away. Mother then searched and found the slices and approaching me, caught hold of my hands and tied them to a post. I was ashamed and full of fear."

Seeing his childlike fear and innocence. Mother burst into laughter. Actually, the Holy Mother was enjoying looking upon Venu as the child Krishna who was tied to a mortar by His mother Yashoda for stealing butter and milk from the Gopis' houses. After a couple of seconds. Mother untied him and lovingly served him with some mango pickles. She said, "Son, only if the taste of the tongue is controlled can one enjoy the taste of the heart."

Mother has her own ways to exhaust the negative tendencies of her spiritual children. Sometimes she will say, "I am a crazy girl who knows nothing." She will pretend as if she is an ignorant and innocent village girl but her eyes will be penetrating to the truth of everything. Once the mistake is detected, then one can see the Great Teacher in her rising up and instructing the student befittingly while concealing her Motherhood temporarily.

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Sreekumar, a resident in the Holy Mother's Ashram, was an electronic engineer before coming to her. While studying for his B.A. in 1979, he heard about a woman who could assume divine moods and bless devotees in various ways according to their particular problems. Though believing in God, he doubted that Divinity could manifest through a human being. Observing the nature of this world where a few are happy and the majority suffer, his faith in an all-good God waned. It was at this juncture that he came to know about the Holy Mother and decided to go and see for himself whether or not she possessed divine power.

With a skeptical mind, he came to the Ashram in March, 1979 and entered the shrine room drawing dose to the Holy Mother. Her loving and compassionate glance entered deep

into Sreekumar's heart. Her mere presence transported him to another world where God, His Holy Name and himself alone existed and he became oblivious to his surroundings. This experience bound him to Mother and his mind became filled with the thought of her alone.

About his second meeting with the Holy Mother Sreekumar says, "I heard some people calling her 'child' (kunju) while others called her 'Mother' (Amma). After Bhava Darshan, she talked with the devotees. All of a sudden, she would behave like a small and innocent child. She would play with the devotees and seeing her innocent sports, their hearts would rejoice forgetting everything else. Sometimes she would sing and dance and the next moment, while hearing a song, she would shed tears and sit motionless as if lost to the world. Some bowed down before her and others kissed her hand and still others sang devotional songs. Then, like one gone mad she would roll on the ground and laugh."

In the beginning, Sreekumar felt that Mother was being temporarily possessed by the Divine Mother Kali and Krishna but gradually, due to close association with her, he came to understand that she was actually manifesting her inner identity with the Supreme Reality.

Sreekumar's relationship with the Holy Mother strengthened day by day. It became very difficult for him to be away from her. Whenever he could get time, he would avail it by spending some moments near the Holy Mother. Sometimes the Holy Mother would feed him with her own hands and would give him spiritual instructions at the same time. One day she asked him, "Has Mother given you a mantra to repeat?" He replied, "Yes, it was written on a small piece of paper and given for the improvement of my studies." Mother then told him, "Son, during Devi Bhava, Mother will initiate you." That night, Sreekumar was initiated with a mantra after which he decided to dedicate his life to spirituality under the Holy Mother's guidance.

Although Sreekumar's parents were devoted to the Holy Mother, they disagreed with him about his becoming a monk.

Their objection was mainly due to the fact that his father was retired and his sister still remained to be married. They therefore arranged a job for him in Bangalore about 600 kilometres away. On certain days when his breaking heart would yearn too much for her presence, he would get a vision of her. In order to console him. Mother used to send him occasional letters. It was at this time that he wrote the following song:

O Mother, even though You are near
I am wandering unable to know You.
Even though I have eyes
I am searching unable to see You.

Are You the beautiful moon
That blooms forth in the blue winter night?
I am the wave that, unable to reach the sky
Beats its head against the short.

When I came to understand the truth
That all worldly comforts are worthless
I longed to know You
Shedding tears day and night.

Won't You come to comfort me
Who am weary of the burden of sorrow?
With the desire that You will come
I am waiting always.

Owing to his intense desire to see the Holy Mother and to stay with her, Sreekumar returned home even before the completion of one month in Bangalore. Laid up with fever, he was hospitalised immediately after arriving home. His longing to see the Mother went on increasing until one morning at 4 a.m., he had a wonderful experience.

ttMy father had gone out to get some coffee for me. I was alone in the room when all of a sudden my hands and legs became as if paralysed. A cool and gentle breeze carressed me and to my great surprise I saw Mother entering the room.

With a benign smile on her face, she walked towards me. Like a small child, I started crying. She then sat near me and put my head on her lap. She didn't speak anything. I was overcome with emotion. Words stuck in my throat. An effulgence from Mother's body pervaded the room and she herself was surrounded by a divine light. At that moment, the door opened and my father walked in. The Holy Mother immediately vanished."

A few days later, Mother visited Sreekumar's house. It was in the morning and she was sitting in front of the house playing with some children. All of a sudden, she got up and walked through the fields towards the cast with her hands forming a mudra. After walking a short distance, she entered a forest where a certain family had been worshipping snakes. In a semi-conscious mood and with half-closed eyes, she cast a bewitching smile and sat on the small shrine built for the snake worship. Several people gathered there to see this unusual sight. However, no one would enter the forest which was full of poisonous snakes. Hearing about the news, the owners of the forest also came there and stood before Mother with joined palms.

They asked, "Mother, we are doing the worship without any break. Do we have to perform anything more?" Mother replied, "Keep a glass of fresh water here daily. That will suffice." When the Holy Mother came back to the house, they asked her, "Mother, what made you go there?" She replied, "Worship of the snakes has been going on there since a very long time. Mother went there to satisfy the desire of the presiding deities which have been installed in that forest. From the moment that I arrived here, I have been having the feeling that they are beckoning me."

Shortly after this, Sreekumar's parents found him a job in Bombay. Their insistence was so great that finally Sreekumar had no other choice but to go there. With great reluctance he proceeded to Bombay, once more separated from the Holy Mother. While travelling in the train, he intensely felt the presence of the Holy Mother. In a half-waking, half-sleeping

state he incessantly enjoyed visions of her and the bliss of her Divine Presence. Finally, after eight months he was unable to bear the separation from her any longer and submitted his resignation to his employer.

During his stay in Bombay, Sreekumar wrote this piece of poetry which reveals his aching heart:

The sun has set in the western ocean
And the day has started its lament...
It is but the play of the Universal Architect.
So why should you, O closing lotuses, be dejected?

This world, full of misery and sorrow
Is but a drama of God and I, the onlooker,
Am but a wooden puppet in His hands
Having no tears to shed.

Like a flame, my mind is burning up in
Separation from You in this ocean of grief.
lam getting tossed about
Unable to find the shore.

Even before coming to Mother or taking up to spiritual life seriously, Sreekumar used to have certain experiences in the astral plane of existence. While lying down, he would feel his subtle body coming out of his gross body and travelling around. During such moments, even though his eyes were closed, he would clearly see the objective world.

During his stay in Bombay, he had a thrilling experience. It was daytime and he was relaxing with his eyes closed after meditation. Suddenly, his body became stiff. He felt his subtle form become separated from the gross one and immediately heard a thundering sound followed by an outpouring of billows of smoke into the atmosphere in the midst of which he beheld the figure of the Holy Mother dressed in the colourful costume which she wears during Devi Bhava. The magnificent stature of the Holy Mother created awe and rev-

erence in his mind. A few minutes passed while beholding this sublime vision, himself unable to move or open his eyes.

On the evening of the 28th of January, 1980 Srcckumar was about to go to his house to visit his parents when Mother stopped him saying, “Stay here; don't go anywhere today.” In his own words, “I was happy to hear Mother’s words and cancelled my plans to go out. At around 6 o’clock in the evening I was standing outside talking to some people when suddenly something bit me on the leg. I cried out in pain hearing which Mother came running to the spot. Immediately finding the wound. Mother sucked out the blood and poison and then spat it out. Inspite of this, the pain became unbearable. Seeing me rolling in agony due to the excruciating pain. Mother tried to comfort me. Finally, due to the insistence of others, she allowed me to be taken to a doctor specializing in snake bites. The doctor told, 'The snake which has bitten you was an extremely poisonous one but strangely enough the poison does not seem to have affected your body or blood.’ By Mother's loving and affectionate care, I at last fell asleep at 3 a.m. only after which Mother herself retired.

The next morning Mother told me, 'Son, wherever you might have been, you were destined to be bitten by a snake. However, as it happened in Mother's presence, nothing serious has come of it. That is why Mother prevented you from going away from here yesterday.’ Later, after reaching my house, I went through my horoscope and was surprised to find that something had been written therein concerning that would-be fatal incident. It said, 'At the age of 22 there is the probability of poisoning. Therefore, special worship and offerings in the temple should be made for good health’.”

By the Grace of the Holy Mother, Sreekumar had several spiritual experiences which always served as a source of inspiration for him to continue his sadhana with more and more enthusiasm. After making some provision for his parents and sister, he came to settle permanently at the Ashram.

Pai and Rao were relatives who were also close friends. They were like one soul in two bodies. Pai was a devotee of the Mother Kali. Hearing about the Holy Mother from his friend Rao, Pai came to see her in 1979. Then he was 21 years old. Getting off at a nearby bus stand, he asked a bystander to tell him the way to the Ashram. Instead of answering Pai's question, the man abused Mother and even tried to prevent him from going there saying, "Don't go there, it is a place where all kinds of evil things go on." "Let me go and see for myself," Pai responded and then he proceeded towards the Ashram.

It was a Bhava Darshan day and there were a large number of people present. A soulful song 'O Mother, the knower of the beginning, the middle and the end (of Creation), the Eternal Virgin' sung by the Holy Mother, welcomed Pai to the Ashram. Shortly after this. Mother revealed her identity with the Divine Mother of the Universe during the Bhava Darshan. When his turn came, Pai entered the temple and approached the Holy Mother. When he gazed upon her face overflowing with motherly' love, Pai burst into tears. He tried to control them, but could not do so. His heart was full of bliss and within a few minutes he experienced a rare calm and peace of mind.

The Holy Mother told him, "Son, I am your Mother." The moment the ^Mother uttered these words, Pai again cried aloud like a small child. For all practical purposes, Pai was an orphan. Though both his father and mother were alive, it was as if they had died, since they had separated and he had no contact with them, being raised by his grandmother and grandfather. Now, for the first time in his life, he heard a true mother's sincere words of love. Deep within him, Pai felt that his relationship with the Holy Mother was not a new one but had existed since time immemorial.

That first meeting with Mother created a very strong impact on Pai's mind. The Mother's form became deeply imprinted on his heart. Many things would vividly remind him of Mother. If, while walking on the road, he happened to hear the tinkling of anklets, he would suddenly turn and look

thinking that it was Mother who had come to him (Amma used to wear anklets with small bells attached in those days). If he happened to see a girl with a nose ring, he would feel as if it were the Holy Mother herself.

With each passing day his devotion intensified. His tender feelings knew no bounds. At that time he was employed in a shop, but as he could not concentrate on the work he soon resigned. However, not being able to stay permanently at the Ashram due to lack of facilities, Pai obtained a job as a clerk in another shop only to resign once more six months later after realizing that the company and atmosphere were not conducive to spirituality. It was a place where one could easily fall a prey to intoxicants and women. After meeting the Holy Mother, a strong aversion developed in Pai's mind towards all worldly enjoyments.

Pai's new way of life did not win the: favour of his relatives, friends or the villagers. Some tried to advise him against going to the Holy Mother, but Pai utterly ignored them. They spread rumours that it was Pai who took Rao to the Holy Mother and that it was he who was responsible for Rao's sudden change. This reached the cars of Rao's parents and other family members. They too turned against Pai. Rao's friends also joined with them. They' threatened Pai saying that they would chop off his legs if he stepped into Haripad. His unshakeable faith in the Holy Mother gave him the courage and mental strength to confront these challenges.

In those days, the Mother's parents would not allow most of her spiritual children to visit the Ashram except on Darshan days. Having left his house and relatives, Pai would spend his nights on shop verandahs, in bus stations and temple compounds. As one gone mad, he would wander around. Sometimes he would get something to eat, at other times he would starve for days together. A soul which thirsts to attain eternal union with God won't care about all these things. Days, weeks and months passed. Still Pai would come to see the Holy Mother on all the Darshan nights and at other times when she would visit devotees' houses.

At last, when an Ashram was formed, Pai also came and stayed with the Holy Mother. Instructed by her, Pai continued his spiritual practices. Pai always meditated on the Holy Mother in one particular pose. He cherished a wish to get such a photo of her but was afraid to speak out his desire to the Holy Mother. How could one ask her to sit in a particular pose in order to take a snap shot? He did nor open his heart to anyone concerning this.

One day, Pai felt very sad about this matter and wept for a long time. Suddenly, Mother walked towards him and smilingly said, “Son, Mother knows your desire. Mother will fulfill it.” After a couple of days. Mother called Pai and went to the temple. She sat on the peetham (stool) where she would usually sit during the Devi Bhava. Immediately upon sitting down, the Holy Mother became absorbed in samadhi. It was exactly this pose which Pai had held dear. Calling Sreekumar, a photo was taken and Pai became full of joy.

Though one is not well versed in the scriptures; by the Gum's Grace one can become an expert speaker. One of Pai’s experiences illustrates this fact.

Once a devotee from Trivandrum came to see the Holy Mother. He wanted one amongst her children to give a seven day discourse on the great epic Srimad Ramayana. He prayed to Mother to kindly send one of her spiritual children to fulfill his wish. The Holy Mother told him, “None of the children have learnt Ramayana. Therefore, your request is difficult to fulfill. ” The devotee then said, “Mother, please don’t say so. I have promised the people that I will bring someone. Please save me! ” At last. Mother suggested Pai as the one to give the discourses. When he came to know about it he was shocked. He thought, 'Without having read or learnt Ramayana, how can I give a discourse? ’

Mother called Pai aside and asked him to bring the Ramayana from the library. When it was brought, she took the Sundarakanda (one chapter in the book) and asked him to read it. Hardly had he read ten lines when Mother asked him to stop and said, “That is enough. Now you go.” Having full faith in

Mother's words, Pai went to Trivandrum. He stayed there for seven days and delivered speeches on Ramayana. It was a great success. Everyone appreciated Pai's deep insight into the subject. At the end of the seven days, Pai frankly told everyone that in truth, he had not even studied the Ramayana and that all had happened by the Holy Mother's Grace. Yet no one would believe him. Nothing is equal to the boundless compassion and Grace of a Perfect Teacher. It is that Grace which makes man into God.

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Ramakrishnan is the son of brahmana parents belonging to Palghat in Kerala. In 1978, when he was an employee of the State Bank of Travancore, he heard about the Holy Mother from one of his friends. One evening he came to see her accompanied by the same friend. Though bom and brought up in an orthodox family, Ramaknshnan was heading for trouble due to the influence of college studies and bad company. On the verv first day itself when he saw the Holy Mother he burst into tears. All his inner coarseness melted and softened until everything was washed away in those purifying tears. After this, he would come for almost all the Darshans in order to see Mother in the Divine Mood. He would cry like a small child and pray to her to give him the vision of Madurai Meenakshi, his beloved Deity'. He would even fast on certain days in deep sorrow for not having gained that Vision. On such occasions, the Holy Mother would feed him with sweet pudding without even making a mention of his fast. Shedding tears of intense yearning while lying on Mother's lap during Devi Bhava, he would ask her, "Mother, will you come to me tomorrow? At least let me hear the jingling of your anklets. " Due to his sincere supplications, he was fortunate to have many such visions of his beloved Deity. On some days he would hear the jingling of Mother's anklets and would sometimes get the vision of the Divine Mother or at other times he would smell a divine fragrance pervading the atmosphere around him.

There were two significant events which inspired Ramakrishnan to abandon worldly life and take up to a life of renunciation and spirituality. The first was on the day that he received initiation from the Holy Mother. On that auspicious occasion he felt an inexpressible power transmitted from her to him which totally changed his conception about the meaning and goal of life. The second event was as follows:

One day, while showing a picture of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa to Ramakrishnan, Mother said, “Both of you have the same name yet you have become like this.” These words of the Holy Mother pierced into the inner recesses of Ramakrishnan’s heart like a lightning bolt and strengthened his desire to become a real spiritual aspirant.

One summer evening Ramakrishnan came to have Darshan of the Mother during Devi Bhava. It was extremely hot inside the temple where Mother was sitting. Mother asked him to fan her. He, however, hesitated as there was a group of young ladies standing outside near the temple. He thought to himself, *If a young man like me who is an employee in the State Bank fans a woman, they may laugh at me.’ Thinking thus, he didn't fan the Mother. But while coming out of the temple after Darshan, he hit his head severely on the wooden lintel over the door. Seeing that, all the young ladies standing there burst into laughter. Ramakrishnan turned pale and felted abashed.

The next day, when Ramakrishnan went for Darshan Mother called him and said, “Yesterday you wouldn’t fan me even though I asked you to. Therefore I thought it would be for your good to make you a laughing stock in front of the young ladies whose laugh you feared!” From the next Darshan onwards, Ramakrishnan regularly fanned Mother even without being asked.

At one time, Ramakrishnan was transferred to a branch of the bank about 100 kilometers away from the Ashram. His duty was to keep the key of the safe with him and arrive promptly at 10 a.m. every morning. Leaving the Ashram the following morning after the Sunday night Darshan,

Ramakrishnan boarded the bus and reached a bus stop about 13 kilometres from his office. Enquiring there, he came to know that there would not be any bus going to his destination before 10 a.m. He then tried to get a taxi but none were available. Worried and upset, he called out “Amma!” Within a few moments, a man came along on a motorcycle and stopped in front of him. He was a complete stranger. Turning to Ramakrishnan he said, “I am going to Pampakuda (the same village where Ramakrishnan was working). There are no buses until after ten so if you are willing I will drop you there.” Ramakrishnan agreed and sitting on the back seat reached the place and walked into the bank at exactly 10 o’clock!

Replying to Ramakrishnan’s query. Mother told him, “One call is enough if done with concentration. God will reach there.” In 1981, Ramakrishnan had an experience which taught him a good lesson in obedience to the spiritual Master. Out of fear that Ramakrishnan would become a monk if he were to live in the Ashram too long, his parents tried to get him transferred to a branch bank in his home town near to them. Owing to their constant pressure, he at last submitted an application for transfer without seeking Mother's advice or permission. After some days, he changed his mind and sent a letter to the bank authorities requesting them to ignore his previous application.

One day Mother said to him, “Better enquire about the second letter sent to the bank. It seems that it did not reach there.” Ramakrishnan replied, “That is not necessary. Mother. They must have received and accepted it.” Mother insisted several times that he enquire about the second letter but Ramakrishnan did not take her words seriously.

Before long, Ramakrishnan received his transfer orders from the authorities in Trivandrum where the head office of the bank was located. Rushing there, he met the officers in charge but it was too late. As Mother had said, they had not received any letter asking them to ignore the previous application. It had somehow got lost. In this way, Ramakrishnan learnt the bitter lesson that even seemingly insignificant statements of one's Guru should not be ignored.

One day while in the middle of a conversation, Mother turned to Ramakrishnan with a frown on her face and said, “There are some who still look at girls even after taking up to a life of renunciation.” Ramakrishnan asked, “Who is that. Mother?” “You!” Mother replied. Ramakrishnan was shocked. “What, me? I never look at women. Mother is scolding me for no fault of my own,” he pleaded.

The next moment Mother uttered the name of a woman well-known to Ramakrishnan and continued to narrate all the details relating to her husband's name, the names of the children and other family members, etc. Ramakrishnan stood motionless with his mouth wide open. Hearing the exact description, whereabouts and other details about a woman utterly unknown to the Holy Mother, he stood dumbfounded. Mother again asked him, “Hey, Ramakrishnan, tell the truth. Won't you look at her everyday?”

Ramakrishnan kept silent. It was true that he would look at that woman everyday, but do you know why? The woman’s external appearance closely resembled the Holy Mother. Seeing her, he felt as if he were seeing the Holy Mother herself. When Mother saw him standing there without speaking and with his head hanging down, she burst into laughter. It goes without saying that after this, Ramakrishnan never again looked at that woman.

The above incident clearly shows how the Holy Mother closely observes the external and internal actions of her spiritual children and instructs them accordingly.

Before the Ashram was officially registered as a charitable institution, only a few persons were allowed to stay there. To look after the needs of many people was impossible due to the lack of finances at that time. Having left their jobs, some of the brahmacharins looked up to Ramakrishnan for food and clothing. As he was still employed, he would happily meet their needs even unasked.

In the beginning days of the Ashram, Ramakrishnan felt that Mother was two distinct beings, her usual self and the Divine Being during the Bhava Darshan. This idea gave rise to

a lot of confusion in his mind and he would often feel miserable while thinking in this way. He at last requested Mother to bless him and clear his erroneous way of thinking. One night he had a vision of the Holy Mother in her usual mood dressed in white clothes. This happened in the days before Mother was even dressing in white. After this vision, Ramakrishnan believed that Mother was essentially the same person whatever be her mood.

Ramakrishnan's faith in Mother deepened and his mind gradually became fixed on her divine form and name. This state created many troublesome situations at his work place. Sometimes he would make a mistake while counting out money or commit errors in the bank's accounts. In 1982, he came and settled in the Ashram and at the same time somehow continued his office work as well. Later, in 1984 he resigned his job and came to live in the Ashram pcrmanantly.

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Ramesh Rao was born in a wealthy brahmana family in Hanpad, Kerala. He grew up as a moden youth enjoying and indulging in worldly pleasures, following a wayward and misguided way of life. Though immersed in mundane life, he would go to a nearby Devi temple to pray and repent for his loose ways. Before undertaking any act, good or bad, he would go and pray in the temple seeking the blessings of the Divine Mother.

Once a friend of Ramesh's invited him to the Holy Mother's Ashram but he declined the invitation. Later, when he was trying to go abroad for employment, he decided to visit the Ashram in order to know about his future as he had heard that the Holy Mother was endowed with divine powers and could foresee one's future. Thus, in June 1979 he entered the temple and approached the Holy Mother during Krishna Bhava. Before he could say anything, the Holy Mother accosted him saying, "Son, you are trying to go across the ocean. Mother will make it possible if you wish. Don't worry."

At the very first meeting Ramesh was convinced of the Holy Mother's divinity and felt bound to her by a strong feeling of divine love. Returning home, he tried to concentrate his mind on the textile business which he had inherited from his father but he could not due to his mind being occupied with thoughts of the Holy Mother. On some days, his yearning to see her would be so intense that he would close the shop and rush to the Ashram. One day, while taking leave of the Holy Mother to return to his house, she told him, "Son, where to go? You are meant to be here."

One night Ramesh had a dream. The final dissolution of the Universe had arrived and balls of fire were raining down everywhere. The ocean's waves rose up to the sky and threatened to inundate the earth. Gathering all his strength, Ramesh called out, "Amma. '". Immediately a radiant splendour rose up from the turbulent ocean and started to pervade all the quarters. From that effulgence emerged the enchanting form of Goddess Durga dressed in a red silk saree and seated on a ferocious lion. She held divine weapons in each of Her eight hands. Ramesh was full of wonder to find that the compassionate face of the Goddess was the same as that of the Holy Mother. She consoled him saying, "Why fear when I am with you? You are My son. Don't worry. " After this Ramesh had many visions of the Holv Mother in dreams.

Due to close association with the Holy Mother, Ramesh's inner urge to realise God and to live in the presence of the Mother intensified. One day while sitting in her presence, he had an experience which fanned the flames of his aspiration. It was 4 p.m. and Ramesh had come as usual to see Mother who was sitting in the shrine. He entered the temple and after prostrating before the Holy Mother he sat down near her. While sitting and gazing at her radiant face, the whole atmosphere in the temple suddenly changed. The world of plurality vanished from his sight and only Mother was visible. He realised her to lx his own Mother and found himself to be a 2 year old child. Intoxicated with divine love, Ramesh forgot the world. The Holy Mother lovingly placed his head on her lap.

Mother, realising that Rao had become immersed in the inner bliss, gently lifted his head and had some devotees lay him on the floor of the temple. At 9 p. m.. Mother re-entered the temple and found him still lying in that state. Only upon hearing Mother call “Son” did he return to normal consciousness.

Following this incident, Ramesh’s life changed drastically. His longing to see Mother increased. He hardly cared for worldly matters. He stopped going to the shop. His visits to the Holy Mother became frequent. He spent days and weeks at the Holy Mother’s place. This sudden change in Ramesh created an uproar in his family. They put all their efforts into bringing him back to worldly life and persuaded him to get married. But all their attempts ended in failure. One day Mother told Ramesh, “Son, your parents are longing to see you. Go to your house and get their permission to be here.” Ramesh said, “Mother, are you abandoning me? They will make trouble for me” Mother replied, “A courageous man is one who can overcome all such difficulties.”

The Mother sent Rao to his house with another resident of the Ashram. The family members kept Ramesh in their cus- tody by using force. They thought that the Holy Mother had influenced him by using some malevolent force. In order to influence their son to return to worldly life, they performed special rituals. The parents insisted that Ramesh eat a special type of ghee which had been prepared by a priest using par- ticular mantras to make him leave the Ashram and lead a worldly life. Ramesh sought the Holy Mother’s advice about the ghee. The Mother said, “Son, you eat it. If there is any- thing evil, let it be. Because of your spiritual tendencies you have come here. Nothing will happen to such a person even if the ghee is eaten.”

Obeying her words, Ramesh ate the ghee but nothing happened. His thirst for spiritual life did not wane. Now the family changed their tactics which became more harsh and inhuman. They presumed that their son’s sudden change was caused by some mental abnormality due to his disappointment at not getting a job overseas. With the assistance of his

friends who also disapproved of his new ways, they forcefully took him to a psychiatrist for undergoing treatment.

Ramesh told the doctor, “I am not crazy. I will strictly abide by the words of my Guru. It is you who are crazy for this world. Therefore, you try to impose your madness on others also.” At the bidding of his relatives the doctor, treated Rao for ten days. Their aim was to somehow create a taste in their son for worldly life. Therefore, immediately after the psychiatric treatment was over they decided to send him to Bhilai where his relatives lived thinking that a change in environment would help him to regain his old way of life. In addition to this, they tried to find a suitable bride for Ramesh. He was in a mental predicament and wrote to Mother, 'Mother, up to this moment I have not given into their trivial temptations. Even now if Mother doesn’t save me I will merge with the Mother in heaven. I will commit suicide.’

After a months stay at Bhilai, Rao was brought back to his house. His family was convinced by this time that he had given up his spiritual way of thinking and living. They prompted him to continue his textile business. One day, without anybody’s knowledge, he visited the Holy Mother and said, “Mother, if you abandon me, I will die." Without waiting for her reply, Ramesh again started staying in the Ashram. During his short stay of 3 days. Mother warned him several times about his relatives' intentions to create obstacles in his path again and again. The Holy Mother even advised him to go back to his house and wait till they gave consent to take up spiritual life but Rao paid no heed saying, “If I return home they won't let me continue my spiritual practices.”

By this time, Rao's father had lodged a petition against the Holy Mother requesting for police intervention to regain his son who, he asserted, was being forcibly kept in the custody of the Holy Mother. On the third day, Rao's father and some other relatives came to the Ashram with a van full of policemen. Rao boldly said to the police officer, “I am mature enough to choose my way of living and am free to decide on my place of residence.” They didn’t pay any attention to his

words and with the help of the police, his relatives decided to admit him into a mental hospitial in Trivandrum. On their way, all of them got down at Quilon to have their lunch. Rao refused to eat and sat in the car. Suddenly he heard a voice from within saying, “If you escape now you will be saved. Otherwise you will be destroyed.”

The very next moment an autorickshaw came and stopped right in front of him. Without a moments hesitation he jumped into it. He told the driver the destination and asked him to drive fast. There was not even a penny in his pocket. At that time, one of the Ashram residents was staying in Quilon preparing for his Master’s degree in philosophy. Rao told him all that had happened. That night itself with the help of some devotees, Rao left Kerala and proceeded to Chinmaya Mission in Bombay. Coming to know that he was in Bombay, the relatives again tried to disturb him. To save his life, Rao departed for the Himalayas. There was hardly any money with him for his train fare and food. Nor did he have any warm clothes to protect him from the freezing cold there.

Somehow reaching the Himalayas, he wandered here and there. His clothes became torn and tattered. This fair looking youth became like a wandering mendicant begging his food and meditating under a tree or in a eave. Days and months passed. Finally, one day he received a letter from the Holy Mother at an address which he had given her which said, ‟Son, you come. No more problems.’

Rao returned to the Holy Mother’s Ashram. She then sent him to visit his parents who had learnt a good lesson. There was an apparent change in their adamant nature. They were happy to see their son back home yet they still tried to tempt him. When they realised that their antagonistic approach was fruitless, they attempted to change him in a loving manner. But all their efforts were burnt to ashes in the fire of Rao’s intense dispassion. On 27 August, 1982 Rao joined the Ashram as a permanent resident and continued his spiritual practices undisturbed.

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The following is Shakti Prasad's (Subhir) account of his renunciation of worldly life achieved by the grace of the Holy-Mother in spite of tremendous odds.

"It was at the end of 1983 when I met Amma after being directed to her by the late Swami Vimalananda of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Nettayam, Trivandrum in Kerala. During the first year after meeting Amma, she gave me a number of chances to confirm her status as a Sadguru. She imparted many spiritual experiences which established a deep bond of love and surrender. Thus, one day I mentioned to her my wish to join her Ashram as a resident in order to get her teachings This meant resigning my position as Project Engineer in the Electronics Research and Development Centre, Trivandrum, a wing of Keltron. The Mother agreed yet warned me of a strong reaction from my relatives who belonged to the Muslim community.

On the 4th of May, 1985 I joined the Ashram and many obstacles followed which were overcome solely due to Amma's grace and directions. On the 11th of May my father and his people came to the Ashram demanding that I accompany them to my family home saying that my mother was seriously ill. I was obliged to leave the Ashram in their company. The father and others seriously believed that I was mentally afflicted and could be made okay if subjected to psychiatric treatment. I had no choice but to accompany them to many specialists in that field who unfortunately, could not grasp the charm and greatness of the study and exploration of the Inner Reality through the ancient tradition of Ashram life.

On the night of the 16th I escaped from their custody and spent two weeks in an Ashram in Trivandrum where the people have great affection and devotion for Amma. 'The parents then came to meet Amma and assured her that they would not disturb me again. I returned to Vallickavu at which time Amma told me that she did not believe their words.

5 June 1985: Father came to our Ashram and wanted me to accompany him saying my mother had been hospitalized. I discussed the matter with Amma and she commented, "Their

plan is to take you to a remote place for psychiatric treatment." Since the father was not prepared to go back empty handed, I requested Amma to permit me to go just to avoid any trouble to the Ashram. While bowing down at her feet before leaving, she whispered in my car, "You will be safe, I am with you."

At the main road, the car was waiting for me with six people inside. Soon, the course of the journey' was redirected to Bangalore and not Edappally as I had originally been informed. We spent that night in a tourist bungalow in Mettur. I was well guarded so as not to escape as before. At this time I was able to collect a few records revealing their intention to subject me to brainwashing and electric shock treatment. I carried this documentation carefully which would be produced as evidence before the Kerala High Court after one year.

Bangalore, 6 June: A room in a hotel near Subbaiah Circle was taken and seeing that I was indifferent to make any attempt to escape, father and two others left the hotel for making arrangements for admitting me. Finding no way to escape, I meditated for a while and then sought a suggestion from Amma. Immediately flashed within my mind's screen the whole operation for escape.

I requested those guarding me to allow me to go to the verandah to make a phone call to an old friend. Permission was denied. Again I repeated my request and finally made a command. Almost mechanically they unlocked the room and while I was taken outside, in a brisk move I sprang ahead of them and pulled the door with all my force bolting it from the outside, thus locking them all inside. I rushed to the main road for some vehicle. An autorickshaw sped by with a passenger inside. After 50 yards it stopped abruptly. The driver was trying to restart it with the cranking lever. Thanking Ammachi, I ran in that direction and dashed into the auto. That same moment it started and left the place. I could see through the back window that my captors were running aimlessly in search of me.

At Majestic Circle, a travel agent arranged a ticket for me to Calicut[1] by a tourist bus service that same night. I gave him mv name for booking the ticket which I felt afterwards to be a little unwise. Reaching the Mother's Ashram the next day, it was surprising to note that the money Amma had arranged to be given to me while leaving the Ashram was exactly sufficient for my return. Seeing me, Amma commented, "Very' good, but why should you give your name to those bus people?!"

Vallickavu, 17 July 1985 : That morning Amma warned me to expect something to happen and suggested that I should not be sentimental in any way just for the peace of the Ashram. She told me that she was dedicated to the sadhaks (spiritual seekers resident in the Ashram) and will act along those lines alone when facing any situation

At 11 a.m., a big group led by the father entered the Ashram and demanded that I accompany them. As I refused, they threatened me with forced removal. Amma remained cool and said to them, "We will give him protection if he wants; that is our Ashram dharma." The atmosphere became a bit tense as the residents also entered into the scene. As a few local devotees also started gathering, the group left the place giving me two weeks notice.

At 3 p.m. Amma came to me and ordered me to immedi- ately leave the Ashram premises. I left the place at once, not- ing my departure in the office Register. Within minutes after my departure, the father and his people were back with a few policemen from Karunagappally, accusing the Ashram of unlawful custody, etc.

I spent those days in various institutions and friends' houses in hiding. After seeking permission from Amma, I proceeded to Cochin Arya Samaj and had the necessary ceremonies performed so that I could embrace Hinduism as per the Vedic rites. The details were then published in the Ga- zette.[2]

[1] **Eight hours journey north of Vallickavu.**

[2] **A government publication which contains all legal notices, change of names, etc.**

The Governor and Inspector General of Kerala, after hearing of my situation, took some action and warned the opposition. They assured me that I could stay in the Ashram and so I went back there. After one month. Mother gave me mantra diksha (initiation into the sacred mantra) during Devi Bhava. This, accelerated the progress in sadhana greatly.

10 July 1986. Amma was leaving for a reception and bhajan programme at a temple in Vypin accompanied by the resi- dents including myself. On the way we visited our Ashram branch in Quilon and spent an hour there. It is our (the dis- ciples') experience that as a Great Master, Amma first gives hints for right action from within, then from without, and orders will be given only if we miss the hint. Eight months had passed since the last trouble with my family and we never an- ticipated any action from them. But a strange feeling within prompted me to consider halting my journey here in Quilon. This idea became stronger and put me in suspense to make a decision. I looked to Amma for her command; "Yes, remain here," she nodded meaningfully and proceeded to Vypin leaving me in Quilon.

After 2 hours or so had passed, Srinivasan, a brother disciple, came running into the Quilon Ashram. He asked me to immediately leave the place. The Ashram van had been stopped at Karunagappally, 30 kilometres north of Quilon, by the police with a search warrant for my arrest based on a lunacy act issued by the Quilon Chief Judicial Magistrate Court. In vain they had searched all through the van for me.I spent the following days secretly staying here and there. Many other situations and timely help also occurred by Divine Grace.

At this stage of complete uncertainty, I had a thought to leave Kerala as a search warrant was still pending due to its reissue by the Court at my father's and his peoples' persistent request. Also, I felt guilty in creating difficulties for Amma and the Ashram. That same day, Amma sent a message to me not to have any concern and thus assured me that a direction favourable for a solution would come soon.

Two days later, a news article appeared in the Malayalam daily, 'Maturbhumi' that my parents had filed a Habias Corpus petition in the Kerala High Court naming the respondent as Amma. They charged her with illegal custody and stated the need of expert psychiatric treatment for their son's mental illness.

After getting permission and instructions from Amma, I immediately proceeded to Cochin. Through Advocate Govinda Bharathan of the Kerala High Court, I filed an Affidavit-counter staring all the facts. On 27th August, 1987 I appeared before the Kerala High Court with police protection. After a detailed discussion, the panel of Judges dismissed the original petition filed by the father and issued orders for my protection. The presiding Justice also issued a warning to certain persons who had been deeply involved with my harassment during the last two years.

Bombay, Feb. 1987: I had accompanied Amma and the brah- macharins to Bombay for her programmes there. It was then that we received the message that an appeal was being filed in the Supreme Court of India questioning the ruling of the Kerala High Court. They strongly argued that my sanity could be proved only after a twenty-eight day observation by medical experts. This claim had already been dismissed by the High Court's ruling after they had examined all the docu- ments which I had produced, particularly the testimonials from my previous employer and also after a detailed discus- sion with me regarding the causes of my embracing Hinduism and accepting Amma as my Master for spiritual life.

Wishing me all the best, Amma instructed me to proceed to New Delhi. By her Grace, in the first hearing and argument itself, the appeal was dismissed.[3] I was relieved from any additional complexities and risks.[4]

[3] This is a Supreme Court landmark ruling in India which rules in favour of the individual's right to freely choose his religion.

[4] "We do not see any grounds for releasing a notice to Mata Amritanandamayi, nor do we find anything defective in the judgement of the Kerala High Court in concluding the state of normalcy of the petitioner's son and offering him the right to pursue the spiritual life in her Ashram." (13th March, 1987)

The expert in Amma is now fathoming deep into our being preparing us also to contain the Infinite within. Let us continue our journey to the Goal, experiencing and overcoming all natural hurdles, in the soothing care of Divine Love."

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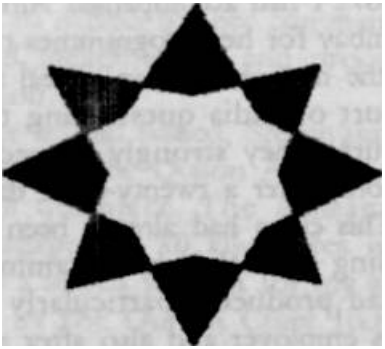


This was the final comment of Justice M.P.Thakker and Justice B.C.Ray of the Supreme Court of India after handling a hearing of the special leave petition by Shakti Prasad's parents. The petition was duly dismissed. Shakti Prasad left New Delhi and returned to the Mother's Ashram in Vallickavu.

PART 4

'The Embodiment of Spiritual Perfection: Mother as the Spiritual Master'

Mother As The Spiritual Master

Who is a perfect person? If this question is asked to a modern youth he would say that an ideal person is a handsome, highly influential multi-millionaire or perhaps a high ranking political leader; otherwise he would tell out the names of some romantic looking movie stars or cricket players. It is a pity that today the youngsters cannot conceive of a society without movies, politics and romance. It is a vital force for them. But do these have anything to do with our life and character building? What makes a person beautiful and perfect? What adds sweetness and attractiveness to one's actions? What is that factor which makes one immortal and adorable? Is it any of the aforesaid things? A mature person endowed with discrimination will undoubtedly say, "No, absolutely not!" Then what is it? To put it in a sentence, it is the integration of inner virtues which in turn will manifest as eternal virtues through one's whole being. This is what one can experience in the presence of the Holy Mother Amritanandamayi, the beautiful blending of unconditional love and bliss.

People from different walks of life, each according to their own level of understanding and mental maturity speak differently about the Holy Mother. For example, if you ask who Mata Amritanandamayi is to a person whose intellect always dwells at a gross level, he would say, "She is an extraordinary woman who can cure terrible and incurable diseases by a mere touch or look." He may also say, "She can also solve your worldly problems and can easily fulfill all your desires." If the same question is asked to one who has a more subtle intellect he would say, "O, the Holy Mother is really incredible. She can bestow on you many psychic powers. She is a master in telepathy and clairvoyance. It is nothing for her to transform water into panchamrnam and milk. All the eight mystic powers are under her sway," and so on. A true spiritual seeker's answer to the same question would be, "The Mother is the ultimate Goal to be realised by an aspirant. She is the source and support of true seekers and helps them to cross the ever-

changing Ocean of Transmigration. Her very nature is love and compassion; she is a veritable witness to the truths expressed in the Vedas and all other religious texts of the world. If you take refuge at her feet, definitely the Goal is at hand. She is a Perfect Master and a Great Mother as well.

From the standpoint of a person who is following the Path of Devotion (Bhakti Yoga), the Holy Mother is a true devotee par excellence. In her one can see the different aspects of Supreme Devotion manifesting unimpeded. When one who pursues the Path of Knowledge (Gnana Yoga) observes the Mother, he can perceive a perfect Knower of the Self in her words and deeds. For a person who is sincerely following the Path of Action (Karma Yoga), the Holy Mother is unsurpassed among Karma Yogins. These are all partial views bom of each one's limited experience and understanding. But through close association and observation devoid of prejudice and presumption, one could clearly comprehend that the Holy Mother is an integration of all these.

There is a proverb in Malayalam, 'As patient as the Earth.' The Mother Earth bears everything. People kick her, spit on her, till her with a plough, dig into her, and cut open her breast using a pick axe for cultivation and other purposes, They even construct hundred story buildings on her but she patiently bears everything. She has no complaints. She despises none but serves and nourishes all in the best way. Likewise, the Holy Mother shows an immense amount of patience in rebuilding the character of her children. She patiently waits until the disciples become mature enough to be disciplined. Until then, she bathes them in her selfless love forgiving all the errors which they may commit.

If one closely goes through the great lineage of the ancient saints and sages of India and observes the ways which they adopted to teach and enlighten their disciples, it is not difficult to understand the unique nature of the Guru-disciple relationship which cannot be seen anywhere else in the world. The Holy Mother would say, "In the beginning a Sadguru (Perfect Master) won't give strict instructions to his disciple.

He will simply love him. He will bind the disciple with his unconditional love. The strong impact created by the Guru's love will make the disciple fit for the Guru to work on his vasanas or mental tendencies. Slowly the Guru, with strict vet loving instructions, will discipline and remould the disciple's personality. In a real Guru-disciple relationship, it will be difficult to distinguish who is the Guru and who is the disciple because the Guru will be humbler than the disciple and the disciple will be humbler than the Guru."In the beginning the Guru, in addition to showing great love for the disciple, may even act according to the disciple's whims and fancies to some extent, but when he finds that the disciple is mature enough to earnestly start spiritual practice then the Guru will slowly start disciplining him. Once the disciplining starts however, though full of love for his disciple who is verily like a son or daughter to him or her, he will not express his love much. His sole aim will be to make the disciple aware of his own Pure Self. In other words, his disciplining itself is another way of expressing his love. That is real love, transforming the disciple into a pure jewel.

Pointing out and correcting the drawbacks of her children the Holy Mother would say, "I am like a gardener. Tlx garden is full of colourful flowers. I was not asked to look after the beautiful flowers which are in no way defective but I have been asked to remove the insects and worms from the pest-ridden flowers and plants. To remove the insects I may have to pinch the petals and leaves which is painful no doubt but it is to save the plants and flowers from destruction. Likewise, Mother will always work with the children's weaknesses. The process of elimination is painful but it is for your good. The virtuous aspects need no attention but if your weaknesses are not removed they will destroy your virtues as well. My children, you may think that Mother is angry with you. Not at all. Mother loves you more than anyone else and that is why she does all these things. Mother expects nothing except your spiritual progress."

One could never see the Holy Mother sitting on a royal seat

commanding her spiritual children and devotees to do this and that. She instructs and at the same time sets an example by her actions. Humility and simplicity are the trademarks of greatness. The Holy Mother is a living example of this. She is humbler than the humblest and simpler than the simplest. She says about herself, “I am the servant of servants. This life is for others. Her children’s happiness is Mother’s wealth and health."

The Holy Mother’s method of exhausting the ego and other negative tendencies of her children is wonderful. Always she is the invincible warrior. The Mother herself prepares the field to test her children’s mental maturity' and spiritual progress by creating a suitable situation. Without causing the least suspicion she leads one to the field. By the time one realises the seriousness of the situation all the inner foes would have risen up and the discriminating intellect gives way to the emotional mind. At this moment the Holy Mother properly uses the opportunity to remove the egoism of her children. Her mighty weapons hit the target without fail and in due course the negative tendencies of those who seek her guidance become weaker and weaker. The following is one such incident.

Once, some years ago Brahmachan Nealu brought a portable typewriter from Tiruvannamalai where he had previously resided. Although Balu (Amritatma Chaitanya) had not learned typing, he took a piece of paper and just for the fun of it typed, ‘Mother, make me your slave.' Mother, who was sitting nearby talking to Nealu suddenly turned towards Balu and asked, “Son, what are you typing?” Balu thereupon translated the meaning of the sentence into Malayalam for her. Without asking or saying anything more about it, the Mother continued to talk to Nealu.

After 15 minutes Mother said to Nealu, “I am going to send Balu abroad.” It was a shock for Balu to hear those words from Mother's mouth as he had already quit two jobs with the intention of staying in Mother’s presence forever. "What did you say. Mother?” he anxiously asked.

“Yes, we need money to run the Ashram. The number of

residents are increasing and we have no income to support them all. So, you must go and work," Mother replied.

'This was enough for Balu. His inner foes raised their hoods and with all vehemence he said, "No, I don't want to work. I cannot go away from here. I came here to stay with Mother and not to do worldly work or earn money." However, Mother went on insisting that he must go until his anger knew no bounds. His negative tendencies stood ready to attack.

Suddenly in a soft voice Mother said, "Son, what did you type just a few minutes ago? If you want to become God's servant, vou have to surrender all that is yours at His Feet. If the mind is not pure, God won't dwell in your heart. To become God's servant is to accept all experiences, good and bad, auspicious and inauspicious, with an equipoised mind. See everything as God's Will. Son, I don't want your wealth. When I see you crying for God I am so happy and my heart overflows towards vou." As soon as she uttered the last word she became absorbed into a divine mood. Tear drops rolled down her cheeks and her body became still. This continued for an hour after which she slowly came down to this plane of worldly existence.

Balu's mind was full of remorse. He fell at her feet and begged her to forgive him. He prayed, "Mother, please purify my heart. Rid me of all impure thoughts and actions. Make me a perfect instrument in your hands. " She consoled him and said, "Son, don't worry". You have come to Mother and now it is her responsibility to look after you and make you perfect. " Hearing these words, Balu felt full of peace and joy.

The Holy Mother once said, "Children, you are happy if Mother always shows a smiling face. If Mother says some- thing against your wish, then you will think that Mother has no love towards you, but it is not so. Mother is always trying to make you stronger. To reinforce you spiritually all mental weaknesses should be removed. To achieve that end some- times she will make an external show of anger. Sometimes, in order to teach you, this is necessary. Take for example a cow that is merrily eating up the tender leaves of a young coconut

tree. It is not enough if one says, ‘Dear cow, please don't eat the tender leaves. The plant will wither away? The cow definitely won't move even an inch. But if you take a long stick and shout at it, ‘Go away, go away.’’ the cow will immediately abstain from its mischief. Similar is Mother's show of anger. Children, Mother has not even an iota of anger towards you. Always remember that Mother has no selfish motives anti acts only for your spiritual progress. If Mother always shows her love and affection to you then you won't look inwards to seek your Real Self. Children, as far as a worldly person is concerned, it is enough for him to look after his wife and children, but a real sannyasin on the other hand, has to shoulder the burden of the whole world. Therefore you must grow stronger.”

Once it so happened that after the usual darshan. Mother could go for rest only at about 4a.m. After she had entered her hut and lay down after closing the door, one Ashramite slept in front of her room as usual in order to ensure that nobody would disturb her by going into the room. Exactly at that time a young woman who, missing the bus, had walked all the way from Quilon, a distance of 35 kilometers, reached the Ashram seeking Mother's blessings. When she learnt that Mother had gone to bed she was crest fallen but still with a glimmer of hope she called Mother aloud a couple of times. Hearing the lady's voice, the Ashramite who was lying down in front of Mother's door got up and took the lady to task for disturbing Mother and even asked her to leave the place. At that very moment. Mother, who could understand what was happening, opened the door and came out to meet the devotee. After affectionate enquiries, the Mother consoled her and assured her of solving the problems which she was facing.

Turning to the person who had slept in front of her door. Mother spoke in a serious tone, “I am not here for enjoying any rest or comfort but rather to serve others and alleviate their sufferings. Their happiness is my happiness. I do not want anyone's service. I am here to serve all. I must be free to meet anybody at any time I won't permit anyone to prevent me from meeting the devotees who come seeking solace and

succour from me. Do you know with what great difficulty they come here with their meagre savings just to unburden their aching heart to me? If you repeat this rudeness and try to impose rules on me that I should meet devotees only at such and such times I will dissolve this organisation. I do not want any such thing as a mission if it is not to serve ailing humanity. A mission should be for service." Saying this, she prohibited the Ashramite and all of the other residents from sleeping in front of her hut.

On another occasion a sick lady who had come to the Ashram for Mother's advice had vomited on Mother's cloth. A resident, one of the girls who was personally attending on Mother, picked up the dirtied cloth with a stick and was about to hand it over to the washerman. Seeing this. Mother took the girl to task and said, "If you are unable to see the one Divine in all and serve all equally, then what is the use of having done so many years of meditation and service? Is there any difference between me and this sick lady?" Saying these words. Mother took the cloth herself and washed it, prohibiting the girl from attending on her for some days afterwards.

The Holy Mother's mere presence itself is inspiring to the devotees. She can inspire and give them the strength to do anything and everything at any time. For example, if there is some work in the Ashram such as carrying bricks, sand and other materials for construction purposes or even emptying the septic tank, cleaning the Ashram premises or assisting the masons in concrete work, etc., the residents would run here and there trying to gather some devotees to help. Sometimes it might be three or four in the morning when the Bhava Darshan had finished and all the devotee would be ready to go to sleep. Suddenly the Holy Mother would come to where the work was going to proceed. She would always be the first tn start the work. Despite the fact that she had been siting from 6 o'clock the previous evening until 3 or 4 the next morning she would be seen working full of cheer and enthusiasm. Very soon word would spread that Mother is carrying bricks, water or whatever it may be and from all directions the devotees would come running. The most interesting part of it is that

the work which normally would have taken 6 or 7 hours to finish would be completed within 1 or 2 hours.

In order to make the devotees forget the strain of the work, the Holy Mother will make the devotees laugh with her great sense of humour and will even make a small fire near the work spot and make drinks and roast peanuts for all those who are working and herself distribute them to her devotees. In the midst of the work the Holy Mother will instruct everyone saying, "Children, while engaged in any kind of work always try to chant your mantra or sing devotional songs. Only those actions which are surrendered to the Lord are counted as real action and then action (karma) becomes Yoga. Otherwise it is Karma Bhoga (action motivated by the urge to enjoy)."

"Even when the Gopis of Vrindavan went out to sell milk, buttermilk, etc., they would call out 'Krishna, Madhava, Yadava, Kesava... ' Even in the kitchen they would write and affix Krishna's different names on all the spice bottles and other provisions. They also discharged the duties of a house-wife. They never sat idle but always carried Knshna's form in their heart and His Divine Names on their lips. Children, try to be like them. "

Whatever questions are asked and whoever is the questioner, whether a thcist, an atheist, a rationalist or an antagonist, the Holy Mother gently, calmly, and affectionately answers them without hurting them or belittling their ideas. For example, one day a young man who visited the Ashram told the Holy Mother, "I have no faith at all in spiritual philosophy and spiritual masters. Is it not better to serve humanity? Many people are suffering from poverty and starvation. What are these so-called spiritualists doing for them? Are they not simply wasting their time sitting idle?"

The Holy Mother calmly replied, "Son, what you say is correct. Of course, service to humanity is important. A true spiritual seeker's life must be dedicated to that. Mother perfectly agrees with that point of yours. But what is real service? Real service is extending help without expecting anything. Who is doing that? If somebody has an idea to help a poor

family undoubtedly there will be a selfish motive behind it. Everyone is after name and fame. Mother knows that spiritual advice won't satisfy the hunger of a person who is plunged in poverty. We must have compassion and love for such people. Real compassion and love will come only by practicing spirituality. We must have a high ideal in our life. We must be ready to sacrifice everything to uphold that ideal. This is genuine spirituality. Simply providing food will not solve anyone's problems either. Again one will be in want of food. So the best way is to help others both externally and internally, i.e. feed them and at the same time make them aware of the necessity to develop internally as well. This is possible only through spiritual education. This kind of service will help one to lead a happy and balanced life in any circumstance even if one is starving. In reality spirituality is that which teaches us how to lead a perfect life in the world. Son, everything depends on the mind. If the mind is calm and tranquil even the lowest hell will become an abode of happiness but if the mind is agitated even the highest of heavens will become a place of tremendous suffering. That is what one gets from spirituality and spiritual masters, peace and tranquility without which one cannot live."

Even the most notorious fellow, who in the eyes of his own parents and close relatives is cruel and who has been hated by them, is a darling son to the Holy Mother. Even such a person would say, "Mother loves me the most. I love her more than my own mother who gave birth to me. I am her child. " This is the impression created by the Holy Mother in the hearts of her devotees. Even about a rogue the Holy Mother would say, "What a good son he is. He is very innocent. " Overlooking their bad qualities, she will speak highly of their goodness which in reality may be only infinitesimal.

Through our direct expenence we can realize that the Holy Mother is a fountain of inexhaustible spiritual energy and dynamic creativity. Though the Holy Mother keenly attends to both the spiritual and material needs of her devotees, she still remains detached and pure as ever.

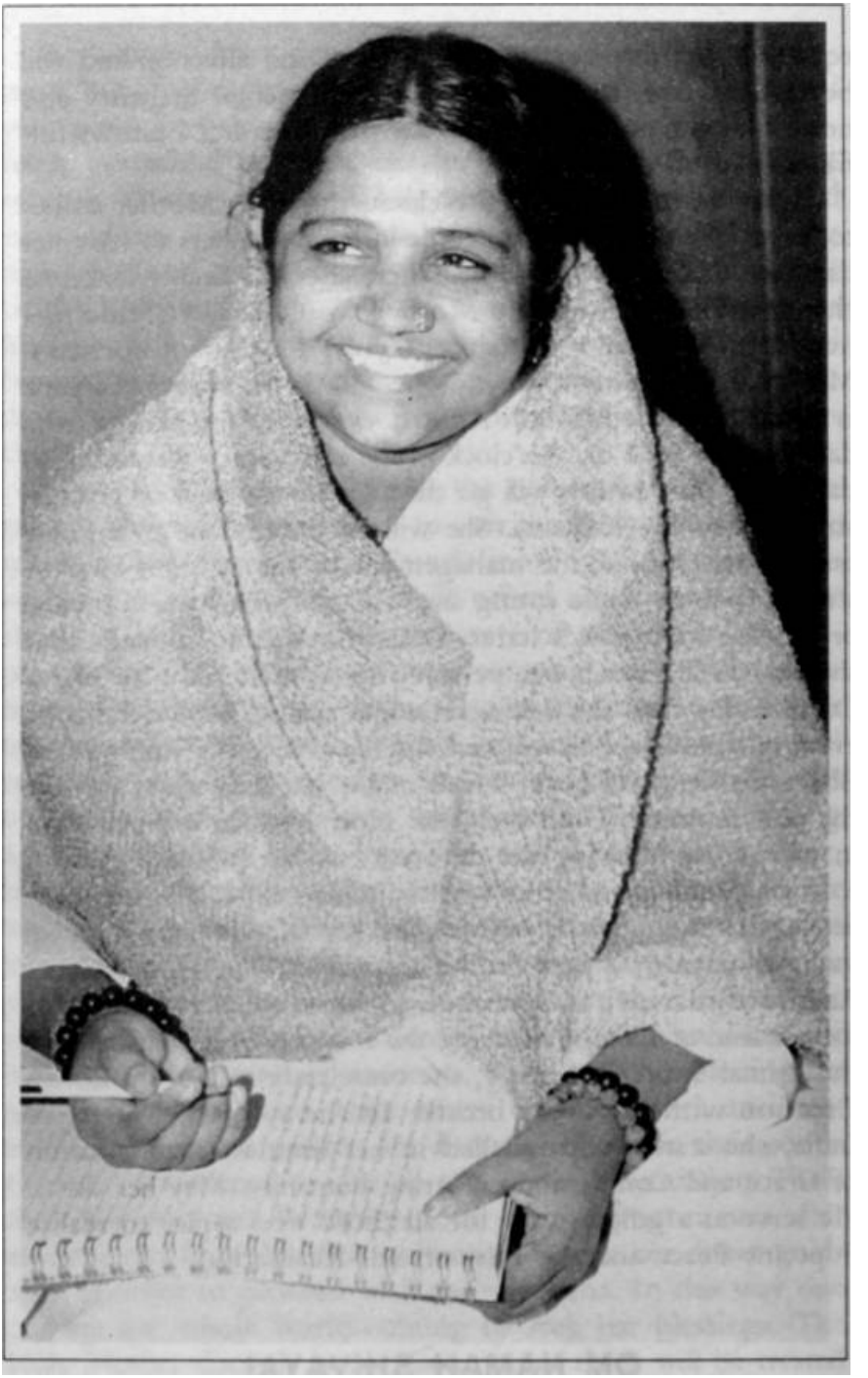
To express devotion and gratefulness, a devotee may remark, “O Mother, you are so compassionate to me. Because of your grace I am having good meditation and my mind is perfectly peaceful.” Someone else will say, “O Mother, because of your blessings, all my family problems are now solved and many of my life long wishes have been fulfilled.” Hearing these words of the devotees, the Holy Mother sometimes will laugh loudly and reply, “Namah Shivaya! Who is Mother to bless anyone? She is just a crazy girl who is wandering around because there is nobody to put her in a lunatic asylum. I am not doing anything. God does everything without doing anything.”

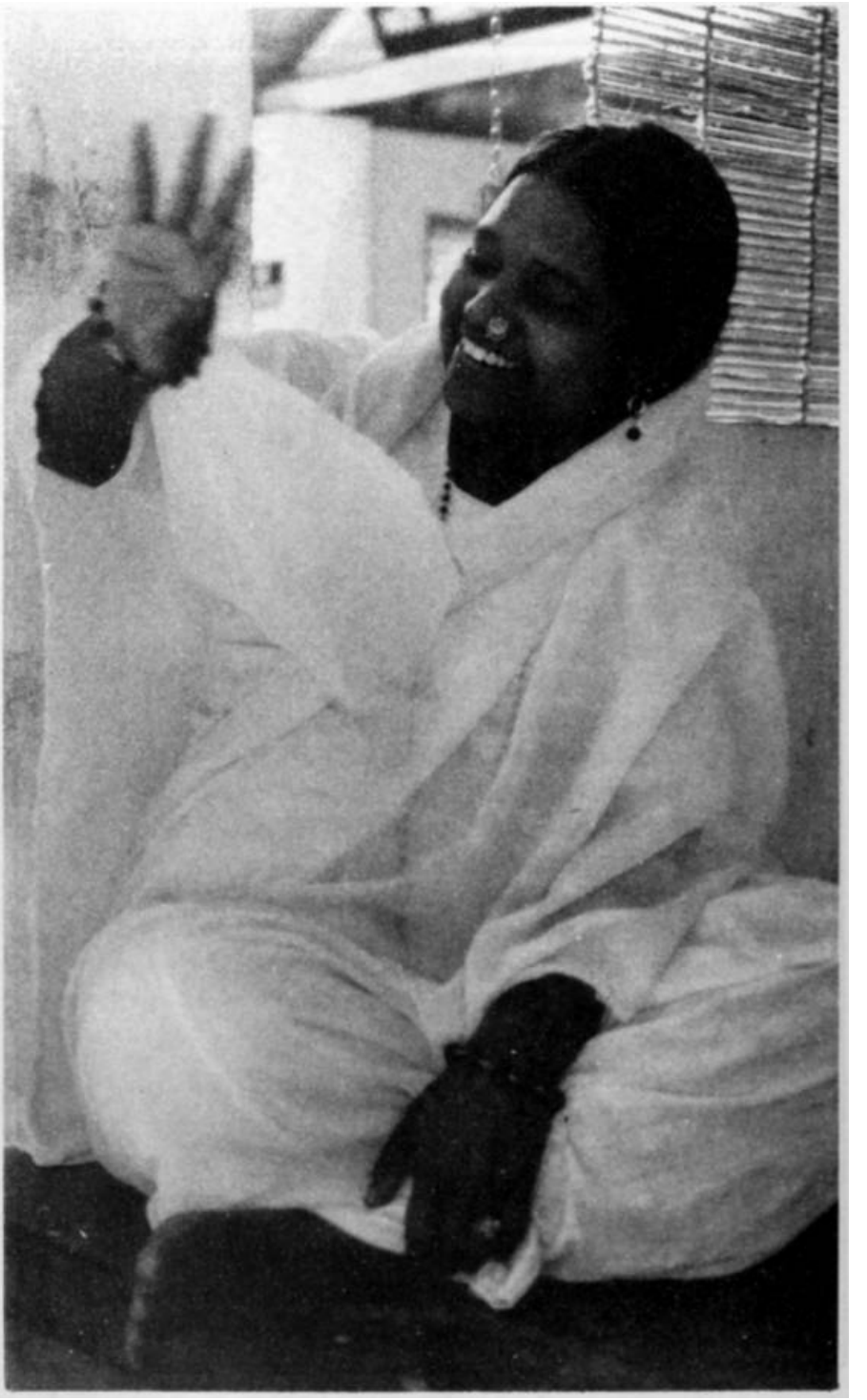
Now let us have a glance at the nature and difference in taste of the people who come to visit the Holy Mother. Some will ask questions about Kundalini Yoga (techniques to awaken the serpent power), while others are curious to know about Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the state of abiding in the Supreme Self. The next person may complain about bad health. Some parents will come crying saying that their only son is totally misled and doing all kinds of wicked actions and will request the Mother to save him. Some young people will complain that although they had finished their studies long ago, they couldn't find a job. They will say, “Please Mother, bless me to get a job.” Husbands will come saying that their wife is not sincere. Wives will say that their husband is not loving them. Some people are there who pray to Mother to punish their neighbour or will tell her that their cow is not giving enough milk or the coconut trees in their yard are not bearing an abundance of coconuts. Some seek her blessings to pass their examinations while others will come with an incurable disease. Some parents are distraught because their son is showing a tendency’ to take up to a life of renunciation. There are a few who will become serious spiritual practitioners after meeting the Holy Mother and come to seek her direct guidance in order to proceed with their sadhana. In this way one can see the whole world coming to seek her blessings. The Holy Mother discards none. Each one of them will be treated

equally giving the same amount of love and affection and will be instructed in accordance with their mental maturity and need. She not only listens to their problems but bestows fulfillment of all desires.

Every' morning around 9 o'clock, the Holy Mother comes to meet the devotees who come in large numbers to have her darshan. Calling each one near her, she will keenly listen to their problems. The Holy Mother would say, "Children, I need nothing from you except your burden of sorrows. Mother is here to shoulder it." She will sit there until everyone is received and consoled. Almost everyday she finishes the darshan only by 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Returning to the room, the Mother will go through all the mail or give instructions to the residents. She will be engaged in giving necessary' advice about the management of the Ashram administration. Even while eating she will be instructing someone or reading somebody's letter. Often times it so happens that she would call a family or a person who came late. If it is a Bhava Darshan day then she will again come around 5 o'clock in the evening to lead the devotional singing. After the singing, the Bhava Darshan will begin which might last until three or four the next morning. Until then, the Holy Mother will be seated in the temple receiving the devotees one by one and listening to their problems whether spiritual or worldly. She not only listens to them but also solves their problems by mere touch, look, or through a pure resolve (sankalpa). The Holy Mother Amritanandamayi is a unique phenomenon even in this sacred land of India. Assuming the Bhava of Adi Parashakti or the Primal Supreme Energy, she ceaselessly serves the Lord's Creation with her every breath. In the spiritual history of India, she stands unparallelled in her limitless manifestation of Grace and Compassion on erring humanity. May her divine life sene as a guiding star for all those who aspire to realise Supreme Peace and the Bliss of Self-Realisation.

OM NAMAH SHIVAYA!





“An unbroken stream of love flows from me towards all beings in the cosmos that is my inborn nature”